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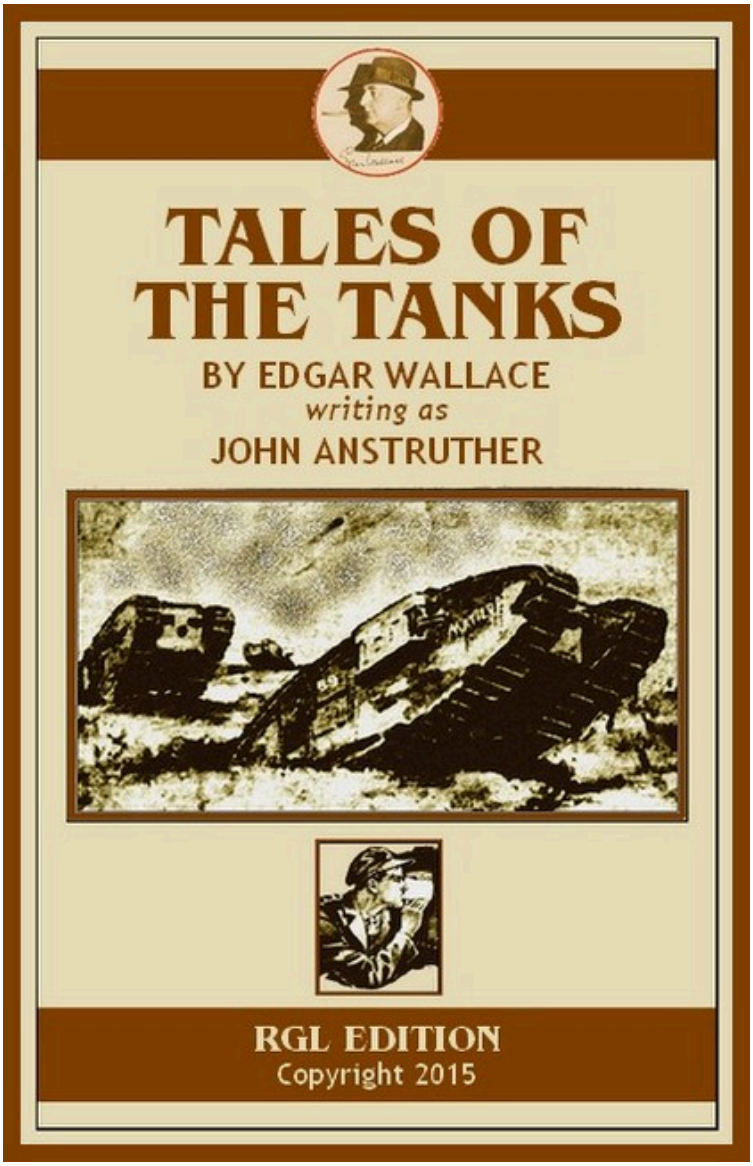
EDGAR WALLACE
(WRITING AS JOHN ANSTRUTHER)

TALES OF THE TANKS



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BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

DURING the First World War Edgar Wallace wrote a number of morale-boosting tales about the skill and derring-do of the British military and intelligence services, mostly in the form of series published under such titles as "Tam o' the Scoots," "Companions of the Ace High," and "Clarence—Private." All of these are available in Roy Glashan's Library, where they were collected for the first time in book form.

"Tales of the Tanks," featuring the intrepid and resourceful tank officer Captain MacBean, is another set of hitherto uncollected war stories in this category. They were published in the Glasgow weekly *The Sunday Post*, on March 30, April 6, April 13, and April 20, 1919. Edgar Wallace's title for the series may have been inspired by newpaper articles published during the war under the same header. Copies of one such article and of an article printed in *The New York Times* on April 13, 1919, under the title "Plain Tales of the Tanks" have been included in the present RGL edition to give the reader a feeling for the nature and significance of tank warfare in the First World War.

Edgar Wallace also wrote several other war series in the form of dramatic renderings of what he claimed to be true stories. Three espionage series in this category are known

to have been published in British newspapers. Two of these featured an intelligence agent by the name of Major Haynes and made their first appearance in *Thomson's Weekly News*.

The first was published from February 9 to May 18, 1918, under the general title "My Adventures as a German Spy in Britain." They were attributed to "Hermann Gallwitz, Agent of Captain Karl von Rintellen, the Famous Banker-Spy" and were purportedly "Written by Himself and Edited by Edgar Wallace."

Beginning on May 25, 1918, *Thomson's Weekly News* published a follow-up series under the title "Major Haynes of the Secret Service," billing it as having been "written from the notes of his Chief of Staff, by Edgar Wallace."

The eleven-part series "The Secret Service Submarine" also made its first appearance in *Thomson's Weekly News* and was subsequently published under syndication in other periodicals.

ARTICLE 1. — TALES OF THE TANKS
ADVENTURES IN THE ADVANCE IN FLANDERS

A report by Percival Phillipson on the advance of July-August, 1917.

Published in the London *Daily Express*

THE tanks more than justified their existence in our advance. The ground they had to traverse could not have been worse, and perhaps there were fears on the part of some people unfamiliar with the resources of these monsters that they would stick helplessly in the mud. True, some of them did become temporarily embedded in the German defences, but not until they had driven well beyond the first line, and, although momentarily gripped fast by the quagmire, they continued to fight and rendered valuable service to the infantry they supported.

Of the fleet of tanks used on the 31st July, the first day of the battle, fewer in proportion were knocked out by direct hits than in any previous battle. The total casualties were remarkably small. The adventures of the tanks began some time before the attack, when they lumbered along the roads up to the front and took up their positions for the advance. The crews had in some cases to pilot their monsters as best they could in the darkness in places where it was impossible to travel with lights. They crawled through miles of roadside camps filled with sleeping men, were greeted with jests by soldiers waiting to go into battle, and were given a clear path by lesser vehicles engaged in munitioning the front.

In Its Stride

One or two regrettable incidents occurred with railway trains. A tank, excusably deaf, and not very quick-sighted, did not notice some waggons standing on a siding that it had to cross, and the driver of the engine did not hear the noise of its approach above the rattle of its own machinery. The tank walked through the train as though it had been a sheet of paper, considerably disarranging the waggon which it stepped on in its progress. A comrade, likewise ploughing through the night, showed its strength in equally disconcerting fashion. It came upon a lorry ditched at the side of the road, and sought to play the good Samaritan by pulling it out. Chains were adjusted, and the tank heaved slowly. The lorry was emerging from the ooze when a cry of anguish from the lorry driver reached the tank. It had pulled free the forward axle of the lorry, the engine, and other oddments, but the rear half remained wedged in the mud. Evidently considering that half a lorry was better than none, the tank unshipped the tackle and went dignified on its way.

The tanks did much of their fighting around St. Julien, Frezenbuig and patches of wooded country south of Frezenburg.

Invincible

The affair of the Pommern defences was the most notable incident of the day in this region. A stream known as the Hanebeek ran in front of the position.

The tanks advancing on the Pommern group had to cross this fissure in the battlefield, which lay between banks of soft, clinging mud, moving steadily a few feet at a time, while machine-gun bullets rattled like hail on its head and flanks, and anti-tank guns directed by observers behind the redoubt tried to get a direct hit. One tank which had cleaned up the wreckage of the back of the farm came upon Pommern Castle from the west. When still some distance away the garrison could be seen scurrying along the trenches into Pommern redoubt. The tank worked its way through the castle and round to the back, leaving the infantry to mop up the concrete refuges. The occupants of Pommern redoubt, seeing the tank threatening them from the rear, ran back into the castle, and actually retook it from our men--a temporary advantage gained more by fright than determination to fight. The tank swung round-- I believe it was reinforced by some comrades--and a second assault on the castle effectually cleared it and all the outlying defences.

Hands Up

Another tank which attacked St. Julien with the infantry drew fire from the miniature fort on the west of the village and halted to deal with this obstacle. One shot was fired, and all the occupants came running into the open with their hands up. The tank could not deal with prisoners, so it continued into a mass of craters, which was the site of the main street of St. Julien, passing through it to the northern side. The Steenbeek had to be crossed. The tank found a firm footing--it got over and back without casualties, leaving our men in possession of the ruins.

The tanks had their hardest task in the wooded tracts at the back of the German defences on both sides of the Ypres-Menln road. In the largest of these patches the trees were still thick when the tanks and infantry, having captured the German redoubt in front of it, advanced on both sides, and it was heavily held by machine-guns. The tanks halted at the edge of the wood, and for hours they searched out its hidden "pill-box" shelters and swept them with their guns. The Germans made no attempt to retaliate against the tanks with bombs. In former battles they followed this plan, giving the gunners an opportunity for which they bad not hoped, and every man venturing near

was killed. Bombs have no effect on the thick hide of a tank, and the enemy now realises this fact. Before his artillery could put the tanks out of action by direct hits, the woods were full of dead Germans, and prisoners state that the casualties were very severe.

Two tanks which were temporarily ditched near Frezenburg helped to retake some ground on which the enemy had regained a momentary footing. Believing that they were helpless, the Germans delivered a small counter-thrust, hoping to capture them, but the tanks turned all their guns on the line of muddy grey figures moving heavily across the field. Some Scotsmen came forward with their bayonets, and this combination effectively broke up the attack.

Guns Unshipped

Some of our casualties were among the tank crews working in the open. Often when a tank stuck fast for a time in enemy country the machine-guns were lifted out and planted among the craters, where they had a broader field of fire. On more than one occasion the manholes of a tank were slipped aside, and often the men leaped unhesitatingly into the German barrage. Some of these gallant crews fought until all were killed or wounded.

The greatest "bag" by one tank that I have heard of was sixty Germans collected from a farm near St. Julien, and other smaller groups were unearthed from concreted pockets between the villages taken.

There is no doubt that the enemy is still desperately afraid of the tanks. Despite the training of special batteries and instruction of the men in anti-tank drill, they have terror of those monsters.

The tanks showed in many ways in this advance that they have profited by the lessons of previous battles. They were in perfect touch with the infantry, and the latter were able to send word from their most advanced positions whenever the assistance of a tank was required. Such assistance was immediately forthcoming.

Seventeen Hours In Action

Many of the crews were confined all day in their cramped quarters--one tank was in action for

seventeen hours, and the crew of another fought from four in the morning until late in the afternoon, and then went to a farm close to a redoubt still held by the enemy, and remained there throughout Tuesday night. The strain of such an experience cannot be realised. The crew are packed together in a small iron box surrounded by intricate machinery. The noise is often considerable, even when the guns are not firing, while the tension and din inside when the tank is manoeuvring and fighting at the same time are beyond imagination.

They are amusing beasts to watch, but no men in this great army have a harder time in battle or face death in a variety of guises with greater zest and cheerfulness than the crews of his Majesty's land ships in Flanders.

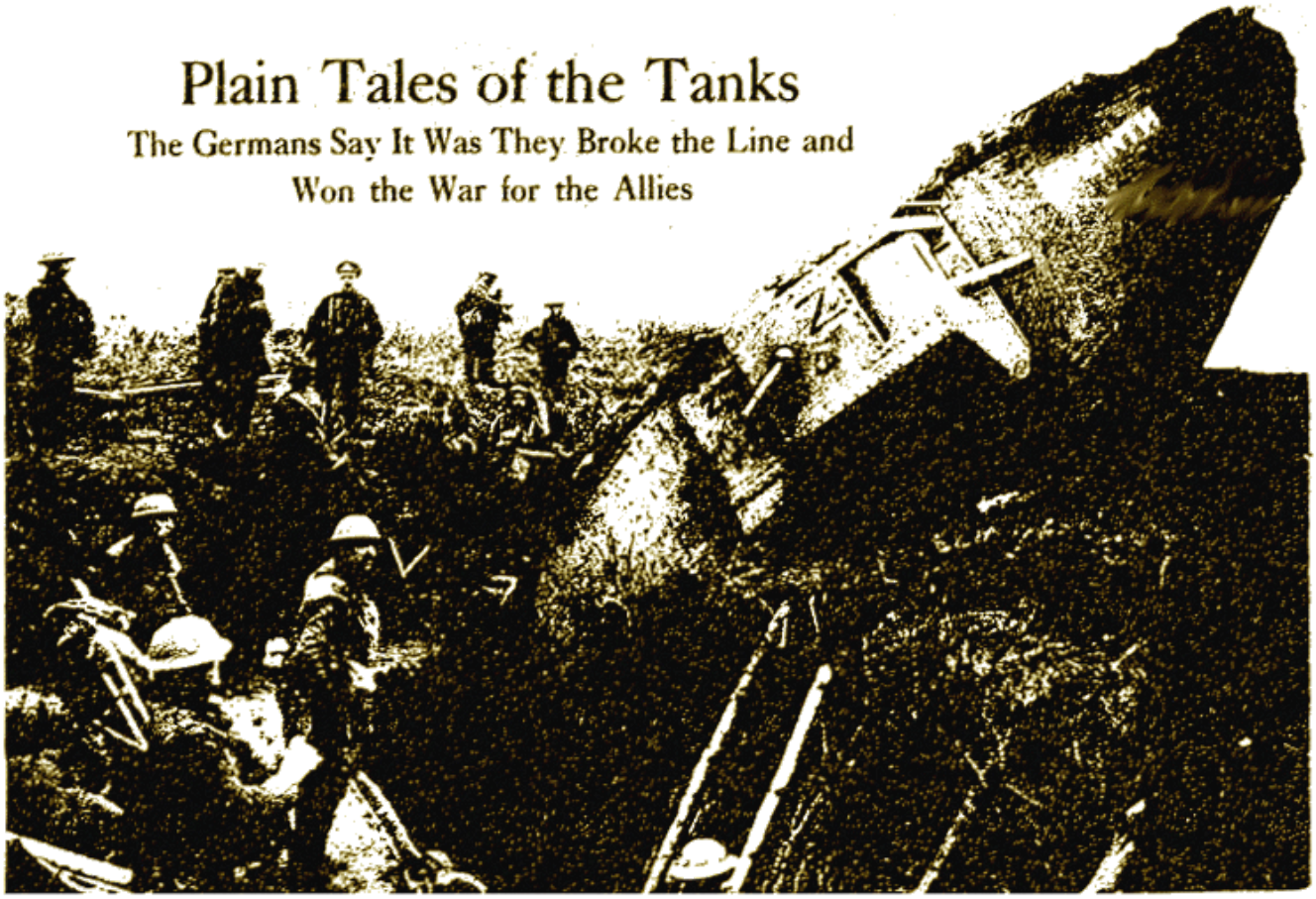
ARTICLE 2. — PLAIN TALES OF THE TANKS

By R. K. CARLSON,
Captain Ordnance, U.S.A.

Published in *The New York Times*, April 13, 1919

Plain Tales of the Tanks

The Germans Say It Was They Broke the Line and Won the War for the Allies



British Tank Temporarily Hung Up in the German Second-Line Defences During the Offensive on the Cambrai Front.

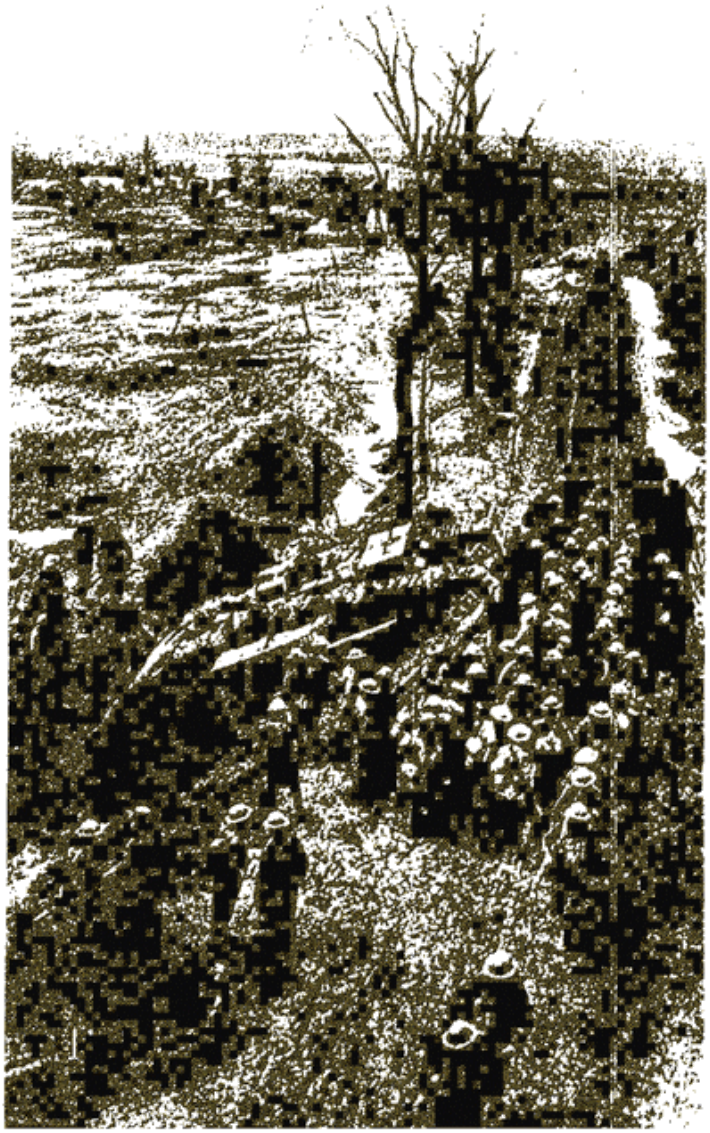
LUDENDORFF laughed at tanks—but he was looking at the German "Elfrieda" variety and not the scrappy, persistent, man-eating English or French breed. Since tanks were developed by the Allies, Ludendorff was acting in true Germanic form in ridiculing this new arm, the power of which was soon to make him bitterly regret his premature opinion.

Tanks were first used by the British Army at Deville Wood. Sept. 15, 1916. In the fighting around Arras in April, 1917, they gave the greatest possible assistance to the infantry, co-operating in the capture of TiIIoyt Neuville, Vitasse. Riencourt, Hendeeourt, Monchy, and Heniuel-sur-Coseul. What they did in the fighting around Cambrai in November, 1917, is already a matter of history. Beginning at Haurincourt, Marcoing, Masinères, Anneux, Bourlon Wood, Cantaning, and Bourlon village, the tanks were everywhere successful, often preceding the infantry and doing great execution among the enemy troops. In many cases tanks captured their objectives and held them until the infantry, very much exhausted, could come up and consolidate the positions.

The tank attack at Cambrai was a complete surprise. No preliminary bombardment was necessary to cut the wire, and the absence of counter-barrage saved at least 10,000 lives. At Ypres before the zero hour the casualties were very high—at Cambrai they were nil. The absence of preliminary bombardment left the ground in good condition, so that when the tanks went forward and cleared passages through the wire entanglements and trench systems, the supporting infantry followed without difficulty, and penetrated to a depth of nearly ten thousand yards. The saving in ammunition and guns, due to the absence of the preliminary artillery preparation, amounted to $25,000,000—and this added to the saving of at least 10,000 human lives.

During the Summer fighting of 1918, tanks came into their own. At Hamel, on the Fourth of July, the operations were entirely successful. Infantry and aeroplane co-operation were excellent. All objectives were taken. The effect of tanks during the August fighting can scarcely be realized. In his official dispatch Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig said:

"Since the opening of our offensive on the 8th of August, tanks have been employed in every battle, and the importance of the part played by them in breaking the resistance of the German infantry can scarcely be exaggerated. The whole scheme of the attack of the 8th of August was dependent upon tanks, and ever since that date on numberless occasions the success of our infantry has been powerfully assisted or confirmed by their timely arrival. So great has been the effect produced upon the German infantry by the appearance of British tanks that in more than one instance when for various reasons real tanks were not available in sufficient numbers, valuable results have been obtained by the use of dummy tanks painted on frames of wood and canvas."



Tank Stuck in the Mud of Old Abandonded Trench Running Along the Fampoux Road.

It is not an exaggeration to say that tanks contributed more than any other development toward overcoming the German machine-gun superiority to which so much of their success was due. Had the Allies been foresighted, and developed machine-guns—the means of enabling few men to do more than thousands—the story of tanks might never have been told. Trench warfare came into being—progress was at a standstill—offensive moves were not possible, and then came the tanks. Tanks broke through the entanglements and trench systems and changed the condition of stagnation into a war of movement.

In his foreword to his "Principles of War" Marshal Foch, Commander in Chief of the allied armies, says:

"The machine-gun and barbed wire entanglements have permitted defenses to be organized with indisputable rapidity. These have endowed the trench or a natural obstacle with a strength which has

permitted offensive points to be extended over areas quite impracticable until this time... The offensive for the time was powerless. New weapons were sought for and after a formidable artillery had been produced tanks were invented—i. e. machine-guns or guns protected by armor and rendered mobile by petrol, able over all types of ground to master the enemy's entanglements and his machine-guns... It is thus that the industrial power of a nation has alone permitted armies to attack or that the want of this power has reduced them to the defensive."

French tanks were used with excellent results around Montdidier, at Cantigny, and in the St. Mihiel sector. The success of the counterattack in the Soissons salient made the Germans realize the enormous possibilities of this new arm. The attack was being held up by enemy machine-gun nests, our troops were exhausted—failure seemed more than likely—the tanks arrived. The machine-gun nests were crushed, new spirit was instilled, exhaustion forgotten, and the objectives taken.

Here are some extracts from German orders and German newspapers bearing on the subject:

"The American Army should not terrify us, we shall also settle with them. More momentous for us was the question of tanks."

"The Franco-American attack on the St. Mihiel salient was carefully planned on an extensive scale. Our losses in prisoners were due to the employment by the enemy of more than a thousand tanks, sixty large and forty small being counted in one sector alone. Our troops defending the positions were early exposed to danger as they were quickly surrounded by tanks."

"Every heavy machine-gun has, as its first duty, to fight any tank appearing within its radius and must be fully aware of its responsibility."

"As soon as the tank attack is launched all anti-tank weapons must have this one aim—to fight until the last tank has been put out of action. As soon as the tanks are destroyed the whole attack fails."

From these few lines may be gathered some idea of the moral effect produced and consternation which

the appearance of tanks caused on enemy troops and their command.

Breaking up trench warfare, overcoming enemy machine-gun superiority, destroying enemy morale while improving our own, saving lives of our troops—these and many other deeds constitute the tanks' contribution to the winning of the war.

Something of the history of the engine is interesting. The principle underlying all tank development was covered in the following patent taken out in 1770 by Richard Edgeworth:

"In making portable railways to wheel carriages, so that several pieces of wood are connected to the carriage which it moves in regular succession in such a manner that a sufficient length of railing is constantly at rest for the wheels to roll upon, and that when the wheels have nearly approached the extremity of this part of the railway their motion shall lay down a fresh length of rail in front, the weight of which in descent shall assist in raising such parts of the rail as the wheels have already passed over and thus the rails which are taken up from the rear are in succession laid down in the front so as to furnish constantly a railway for the wheels to roll upon."

The forerunner of the present "Whippet" type is found in a tractor patented in 1888 in the United States and known as the "Batter" tractor. In type of track and contour, and in method of drive, except that steam was used instead of gas engine power, this tractor very closely resembles the present day fighting machine.

The tank gained recognition only under the greatest difficulties. It was almost disowned by its rightful parent, the army, and was developed under the British Admiralty. Had it not been for the foresight, courage, and public-spiritedness of men like Sir Albert Stern, Sir Eustace d'Eyncourt, Sir William Tritton, Colonel Swinton, Colonel Fuller, Major Wilson, and a few others we might never have had this weapon.

The first designs were completed under Sir Eustace d'Eyncourt, Director of Naval Construction, and the first tank was built at Lincoln, England, at the plant of Messrs. William Foster & Co. Demonstration of its

possibilities before high officials led to its adoption by the General Staff and orders were given for its production. Sir Albert Stern was made head of the Tank Supply Branch now called the Mechanical Warfare Department, British Ministry of Munitions. The difficulties encountered in the early lank production were innumerable and the world is deeply indebted to Sir Albert and his associates for their energy and perseverance.

Utmost secrecy surrounded the building of the first tanks. Not even the workmen in the shops knew the real purpose of the machine they were building. This ignorance was maintained by spreading the misinformation that the machines were to be used for carrying water, and the name "water-carrier" actually appeared on all correspondence and records. For various reasons, chief among them, no doubt, the tendency to abbreviate, this name of "water-carrier" gradually changed to "tank," and has clung to these machines ever since.

Tanks were being developed in France at about the same time as in England. The French tanks were originally designed for purposes of carrying up infantry, the principle of employment being analogous to the famous "Horse of Troy," used by the Greeks in the capture of Troy as told in the story of the Iliad.

When America entered the war our knowledge of tanks was practically nil. But the American command in France saw great possibilities in tanks and set out to learn about them. What they learned and did resulted in a tank-building program of over four thousand light tanks to be constructed in the United States and a joint program with England for building heavy tanks. Additional numbers and types of tanks developed later. An Anglo-American Tank Commission was formed, with Sir Albeit Stern, K. B. E., C. M. G., as British Commissioner and Lieut. Col. James A. Drain as American Commissioner.

The pressing question was how to produce the most tanks in the shortest time without interfering with other allied and American projects. How could these machines of war be transported across to France when tonnage was so vital? How could we get the necessary armor plate--plate requiring years of

experience and trial to perfect? With the world's resources of raw material and skilled labor being exhausted, how could we utilize what was to be spared most efficiently for the production of tanks? The policy adopted was this:

Co-operation with England — which had the greatest tank experience—in the design of an improved tank. This guaranteed the most efficient tank from a fighting standpoint.

Co-ordination of manufacturing and transport facilities. Making armor plate in England, where they knew how— making machined parts in America where we had greatest capacity available.

Building a factory in France for the assembly of components.

Shipping components "knocked down" from England and America to this factory and saving ship space.

All this was in line with the ordnance policy of co-operating to the fullest degree with our allies in shipping components of guns, shells, machinery, and other munitions in lieu of producing at home a lesser number of completed units.

All this was done. A capacity of 300 to 500 tanks per month was arranged. Unity of production of munitions of war and concentration by the various countries on classes of munitions for which they have best facilities is just as important as unified command of forces in the field.

The tank is a fighting machine intended to negotiate rough country, yet, being a machine, it will always have mechanical limitations and shortcomings. Tanks are not submarines or moles, and yet they were used in the Flanders mud and were criticised for failure under conditions for which they were totally unsuited. Later experience showed that the best results were obtained from tanks when co-operation was developed between all arms. Teamwork was perfected. Each arm had a definite share of the work to do and did it. Tactical schools were opened where the use of tanks in conjunction with other arms could be studied. All offensives were rehearsed, and many of the early failures which resulted from imperfect or loosely planned actions were corrected.

When tanks first appeared many officers of the line were skeptical. As yet they could praise nothing but the old standbys—infantry, cavalry and artillery. This prejudice operated in many cases to prevent the fullest co-operation between tanks and other arms.

After the first use of tanks the enemy constructed obstacles on the roads, but since tanks could cross the field as well, these were of little use. Armor-piercing bullets, hand grenades in bundles, and long-range artillery fire were tried. These had little effect against the heavier armor used. A special 13-millimeter anti-tank rifle was developed and issued to the troops in July. This rifle had little effect on tanks, but great effect on the enemy soldier who fired it. The recoil was so great that it is said a soldier never fired more than one shot. Field guns were told off to fire on tanks. These were combated by smoke barrage, airplane co-operation, and better manoeuvring. Anti-tank mines were laid everywhere, and although successful in many cases, means were found of overcoming them. Areas were flooded with water and lines of resistance established behind canals and other bodies of water. Methods of crossing canals were perfected, so that very little was gained. The increased mobility of later tanks and a better understanding of their use kept them far ahead of anti-tank measures.

It is interesting to note that the enemy displayed no initiative in the development of tanks. Although a Tank Corps had been organized and tanks built, they played an unimportant part in the enemy's attacks. The German Minister of War in response to criticism for the inactivity of German tanks explained this by saying that tanks were very difficult to develop and produce. The German tanks which have been captured compare very unfavorably with allied machines. They were slow, stuck easily, and experienced constant mechanical troubles.

Here is what is said in an article in the *Neue Freie Presse*, a long article, of which only a small part is quoted:

"Does the appearance of the tank constitute a complete change of tactics? Tactics is the art of fighting. It lays down the general principles governing the use of the primary arms with due regard to the characteristics of each and with a view to obtaining

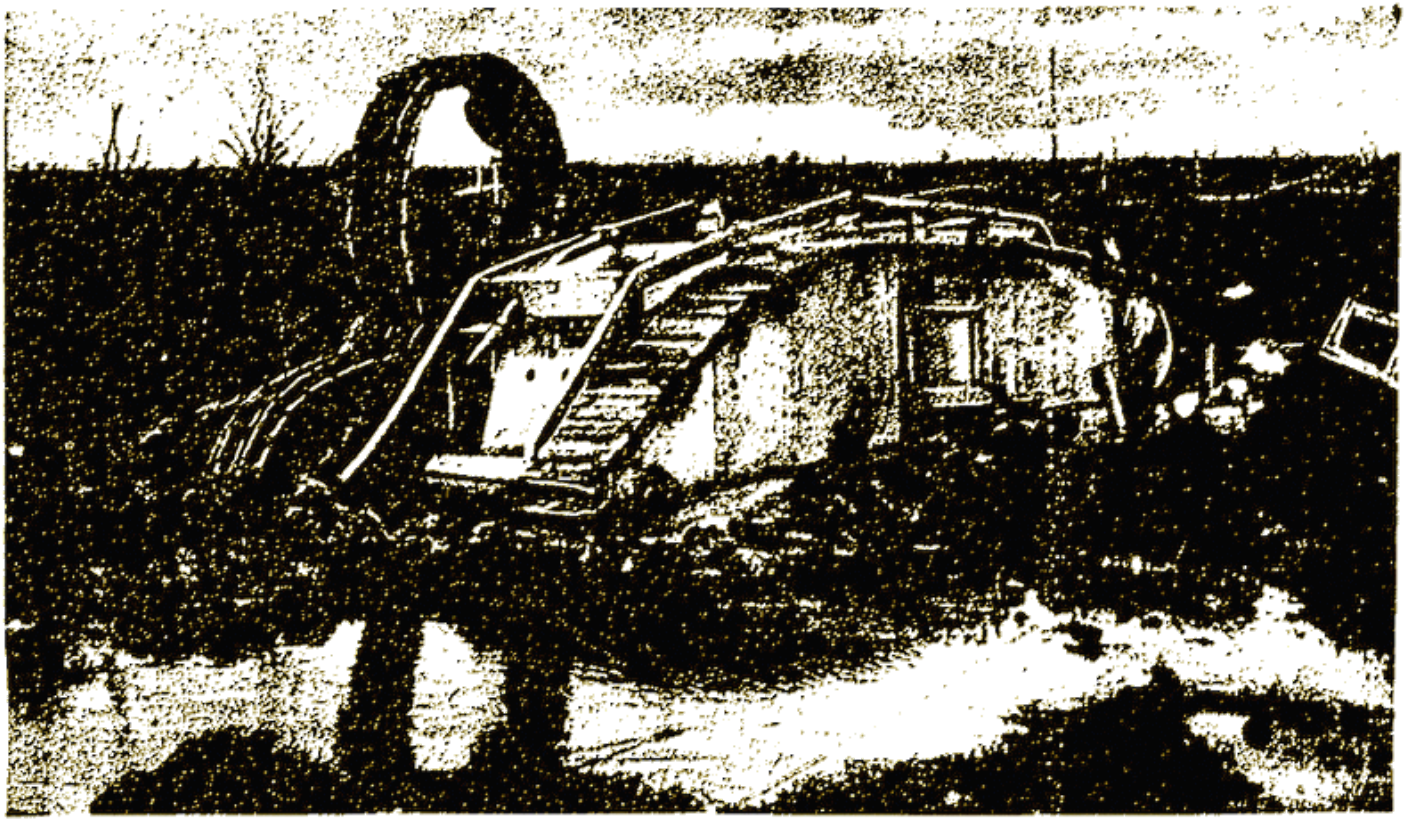
close co-operation among the various arms. Since the war of position made its appearance, the one and only aim of tactics has been the 'break-through.' This is at present the alpha and omega of its teachings. A new weapon for 'break-through' has arrived, viz., the tank. An English invention, the tank first appeared on a large scale at Cambrai. The successes which the Allies have gained since do not rest on any superior strategy on the part of Foch or on superiority of numbers. The real reason has been the massed use of tanks. *The New Statesman* said that the Franco-British victory on Aug. 8 and the French victory on the 10th were undoubtedly the most successful offensive operations on the Western Front. They were obtained by the oldest strategic methods and the improved use of an improved tank.... Enough has been said to prove that the tank is of all arms the most suitable for obtaining a 'break-through.'"

This extract shows the serious consideration that was being given to tanks and tactics by the Gennan command.

Yet present developments in mechanical warfare have barely scratched the skin of possibilities. Money must be spent on design, inventive genius encouraged, initiative developed.

Why was Germany successful in the early days of the war? Because of the more near approach to perfection of her weapons. There is reason to believe, that mechanics will still further revolutionize the science of warfare. Millions of men in the field, men to train, clothe, feed, transport, and care for, may soon be a memory of yesterday. In their place will come new machines of war mechanically operated.

The army of the future will not be measured in terms of men, but in terms of mechanical improvements over men.



British Tank Abandoned to its Fate in the Swampy Ground of the Cambrai Front.

TALE THE FIRST

ERNST VON WEDDENHEIM walked into the palm lounge of the Politan Hotel, London, and took a seat in an inconspicuous corner. He was dressed quietly, and a casual observer might well have been forgiven if

he had mistaken him for a commercial traveller or some business-man who had come to fulfil an appointment. The latter theory would have been supported by the fact that Weddenheim consulted his watch every few minutes.

Presently a girl hurried through the big doors of the hotel and came straight towards him. She might have been a woman clerk in one of the great offices which abound in the neighbourhood of Bloomsbury, or a young suburban wife up for a day's shopping. She was pretty enough, though you might have thought she was a foreigner from her somewhat dusky complexion. Her movements were full of grace—as well they might be—for she was Renée-al-Shah, the famous dancer who had so often delighted Paris, and on occasions had appeared in London.

The man did not get up, but nodded a welcome and patted the settee by his side.

"Sit down, Renée," he said in English. "I was beginning to get a little nervous about you. Have you seen your man?"

She nodded, her eyes sparkling with triumph.

"He is coming to-day to lunch!" she said. "Have I done well?"

"Remarkably well," said Von Weddenheim lazily. "The more so since I am leaving England to-morrow and cannot afford to wait any longer."

She looked at him a little sadly.

"I wish I were going with you, Ernst," she said.

He laughed.

The New Invention.

"Well, we shall see what your Captain MacBean has to tell us, and particularly to show you, and perhaps, if his information is satisfactory you will be able to follow me. Are you sure that he knows what the invention is?"

"I am absolutely certain," she replied. "He has been staying at an hotel in Leeds, and one of the servants has given me a great deal of information about visits he has paid to York. There was some experiment last

week in the North of England, and Captain MacBean was away for three days. He came back limping."

"Perhaps it is a new kind of aeroplane, do you think?" asked Von Weddenheim. "I can't imagine that these Britishers can beat us Germans at that game. Is that he?"

He nodded towards the door. A slim man, with a face brown and lean, and the faintest suggestion of a moustache on his upper lip, was coming into the hotel.

"That is our man," she said in a low voice, and went forward to meet the visitor.

Captain MacBean was humming as he came up to her; he was always humming tunes with which she was wholly unfamiliar, although they were reminiscent of songs she had heard in her early youth.

"I'm so glad you have come, Captain MacBean," she said. "I want to introduce you to my brother Ernest, who has just come back from Chile. He is most anxious to meet you."

"My sister often speaks of you," said Von Weddenheim, "and I can only wish that I were staying a little longer in London that I might improve our acquaintance."

"You are going abroad, eh?" asked MacBean. "Lucky fellow!"

Gleaning Information.

They talked on more or less unimportant matters throughout the lunch, and it was not until they had reached the coffee and cigars stage that Weddenheim approached the subject which was nearest to his heart.

"I came from Chile to offer a war invention to the Government," he said carelessly. "They have been examining it for Heaven knows how long, and they are still making up their minds. Unfortunately I can't afford to wait."

"They always take time to settle inventions. It's rather a big question, isn't it? Are you an inventor?"

Von Weddenheim nodded.

"Then you'll be interested in something I have here," said Captain MacBean, putting his hand in his waistcoat pocket.

The girl watched him with ill-suppressed eagerness, and Von Weddenheim was dying of curiosity. He did not expect to secure information about war inventions so easily, and his hopes rose.

"This is a war invention," said MacBean. "I hope you will not let it go any farther."

He pulled a small, oblong block of steel from his pocket, and laid it on the table. At one end a hole had been bored. Weddenheim picked it up with a frown.

"What is this?" he asked.

"It's the newest machine for sharpening office pencils," said the other cheerfully. "You know the time that clerks waste getting points upon pencils. It is believed that by this method fifty percent of this waste time will be saved."

The other handed back the little block without a word, finding it difficult to conceal his chagrin. The girl, however, was more quick-witted.

"How interesting!" she said. "Can I see it?"

She examined it thoroughly.

"I suppose you have all sorts of things like this," she went on. "War is a great producer of inventions. Captain MacBean is attached to some experimental branch of the army, Ernest," she said, "and sees a lot of inventions. Some of them must be very wonderful."

"They are indeed," said Captain MacBean cheerfully.

"Of course, I hear a great deal," said the girl, "from people who know even more about war inventions than yourself, Captain MacBean. That sounds impertinent, but it's perfectly true. A man was giving me the other day a wonderful description of the new Lewis gun magazine. He hinted there were tremendous things which were happening, great inventions which were going to be introduced into the war, about which even he knew nothing, and if he knew nothing, you would know nothing," she smiled.

"That's true," said MacBean, "but I rather fancy that we are going to introduce something which will not

amuse the Germans."

"A new aeroplane?" suggested Weddenheim.

"Nothing like that," replied MacBean, "it's a sort of a—". He hesitated, and made vague gestures indicating a shape even vaguer. "It's a kind of tank."

"Tank?" repeated the man softly.

"Yes, that's how I should describe it," mused MacBean, addressing the ceiling. "I should call it a tank. Something like this." Again he extended the palms of his hands to describe a wide and indefinite bulk.

"But what would you put in the tank?" asked the girl, her eyes fixed upon his face.

"Well, I hardly know what they will put in the tank," said MacBean. "Things that go off and all that sort of thing. You put them in and take 'em out again, so to speak."

"You are quite lucid," said the girl drily.

"Aren't I?" smiled MacBean, "but it's so difficult to be explicit."

"Explosives?" suggested Von Weddenheim.

"In a sense yes," said the cautious MacBean, "and in a sense no. There will be stuff in them, of course."

"What kind of stuff?"

MacBean smiled.

"I am afraid I have already told you too much, and really I cannot tell you much more than that they are tanks. You will recognise them when you see them."

The Telephone Message.

A page boy came hurrying into the room, and made straight for the table.

"Captain MacBean?" he asked.

"That's me," said the officer.

"There's an urgent message on the 'phone for you."

MacBean rose.

"Excuse me," he said, and hurried out.

"After him," said Von Weddenheim in a low voice, "make any excuse you like but discover what the

conversation is about. You may learn what the tank is for."

The girl rose and followed the retreating figure of MacBean, who was as usual humming hymn tunes. In the big vestibule of the hotel, there were four telephone booths which were supposed to be sound-proof. From the outside this was so. From the inside of one it was possible to hear something of the conversation which was going on in the inside of the other. She watched him disappear into one of the little boxes, and slipped into the next, which, fortunately for her, was vacant. She lifted the telephone receiver to her ear, at the same time keeping the arm depressed by keeping her finger upon it, and listened. She heard the smothered voice of MacBean in the next compartment. Only isolated words came to her, but those words were sufficient to give her the crux of the conversation.

"Four-twenty from Slough? Right you are. How many have you got on? Twenty? That's too big a load for the engine, and besides it may attract attention. Make up the train so that you carry only twelve. I'll be at Southampton to see them off. Thank you very much. Yes, twelve is enough. Twelve is as heavy a load as it can pull. Thank you very much."

She heard the click of the telephone receiver, and kept her back to the glass door. Glancing backwards, she saw him pass on his way back to the dining-room. A waiter stopped him to ask him a question, and he walked over to the reception bureau, which gave her an opportunity of getting back to the dining-room unobserved by him. Presently he rejoined them. She had already given the gist of the conversation to the man, but there was no time for discussion before MacBean came in. He explained that he had to go to the desk to find the telephone call book—a practice of the hotel.

They talked no more of war inventions, and in half an hour they parted, MacBean to catch a train, the spurious brother of Renée-al-Shah to escort his "sister" to the city.

"What time did he say that train left Slough?"

"4.20," said the girl.

"We will go to Slough together," said Von Weddenheim. "Meet me at Paddington at 3 o'clock; in time to catch the 3.10."

At 3.10 to the minute the girl arrived, and together they found an empty compartment.

"I am sure we are on the track," said Von Weddenheim. "I am equally sure that Great General Headquarters have an inkling that the British are going to try something unusual in the next push, and if I can only carry back the news to Germany of what that something will be, it may mean a colonelcy for me, my friend."

"And for me?" she asked wistfully.

"God knows," he replied.

The reached Slough before 4 o'clock.

"Whatever it is," said Weddenheim, "it is not going through London. It is most certainly not going through Windsor; therefore the line to watch is the down main line. He said Southampton too, didn't he?"

The girl nodded.

The Mysterious Tanks.

"That means the train will go by way of Basingstoke and Winchester," said Weddenheim. "There will be no difficulty in finding a place between here and Maidenhead where we can secure a good view, because the train will not have got up speed for some time after it leaves Slough."

They walked through the town into the country beyond, and struck a side road which led to an arch, across which the track ran.

"Here's as good a spot as any," said Weddenheim, and looked at his watch. "We have ten minutes to wait."

Prompt to time the big goods train passed into view. It was drawn by a powerful engine, and consisted, as Von Weddenheim had suggested would be the case, of twelve flat trucks and a brake van. On each of the trucks was a huge yellow object, sheeted and covered with yellow canvas, so securely laced that it was impossible to see what the covering hid. This Von Weddenheim could see long before the train came

abreast of him. He took from his pocket something which had the appearance of a very thick pair of eyeglasses, but which were in reality small opera glasses that fixed to the nose, and were indistinguishable at a short distance from heavy black-rimmed pince-nez, and inspected the train as it slowly passed. Each great bulk, which occupied a long, flat waggon, bore a bold central inscription.

"TANK. FOR THIRD ARMY."

In shape it was not unlike a gigantic but irregular egg. Each truck carried the same, and each "tank" was labelled in a similar fashion. They watched the train till it was out of sight.

"That's very curious," said Von Weddenheim, puzzled, as they walked slowly back to the station. "Tanks! MacBean spoke truly. What do they want tanks for—I have it!"

"I knew you would, Ernst," said the girl, clapping her hands. "Oh, you are clever!"

"We members of the German General Staff are not without a certain amount of brains," he said complacently. "Of course, I ought to have thought of it before. We know the British are going to use a new kind of gas in their next push, and these are the projectors! I suppose they are mounted on wheels and brought close up to the front line. These beastly tanks are filled with gas, the nozzle is removed and the whole of the country is flooded. Ingenious, devilishly ingenious, but I think we'll be able to stop their little game!"

The Spy's Story.

He went back to Berlin with a great story—a story which fully justified the complimentary remarks which were made to him by the high officers of the German General Staff. There was a meeting of the *Kriegsministerium*, to which he was invited.

"A new gas projector, eh?" said the Quartermaster-General thoughtfully. "Well, we've been expecting that. There must be an order throughout the army on the Western Front that the men must have gas drill twice a day, whether they are in the trenches or in reserve. All precautions must be taken and the scientific branch must at the earliest opportunity

obtain samples of the gas and report. You have done well, Staff-Lieutenant Von Weddenheim," he said, "and you go back to the Western Front raised in rank by one grade. You will report to the General Officer Commanding the Thirteenth Army. You will be attached for observation purposes."

"How is the battle of the Somme proceeding, Excellency?" asked Von Weddenheim.

"Splendidly, splendidly!" said the Quartermaster-General, but without enthusiasm. "We have the British stopped, as I predicted. Of course, we have lost a lot of ground and a colossal number of men, but so have the British, thank God! No, unless something extraordinarily bad happens, unless this new invention of the British is something particularly effective, we have no reason to fear anything. We shall win this war as sure as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west."

With this comforting assurance Staff-Captain Von Weddenheim went back by the special train which carried representatives of the staff to the Western Front. News came through to the Headquarters to which he was attached of an impending resumption of the big attack. Hints arrived, both from France and Holland, that the British intended using some new instrument, which, even if it did not succeed at first, must have a decisive effect upon the conduct of war. Patiently the Intelligence Department of the German Army pieced together all these little scraps of news and passed them on. It was absolutely essential to the German that he should hold the Bapaume line, which his enemy was approaching too closely for his comfort. The new attack, even if it was not decisive, might change the whole character of the war, and there were anxious consultations on the evening before the attack was opened.

"It is pretty certain they will attack to-morrow," said General Von Holz, a grizzled veteran of the war of 1870. "Our aeroplanes have observed large concentrations in the enemy's rear. Is this the attack, do you think, Von Weddenheim, where the British are going to use their new gas tanks?"

"I think it extremely likely, Excellency," replied Von Weddenheim.

"In that case perhaps you would like to go into a forward position to observe the effects of the gas."

Von Weddenheim nodded.

"I was going to suggest that, Excellency, if you will allow me to do so. The Great General Staff is very anxious that I should make a report upon the effect of the gas, and I have no doubt whatever about the efficacy of my own gas mask—it is a British one," he said pathetically.

The Expected Gas Attack.

He reached Fleurs at half-past two in the morning, and found the regimental commander and his staff getting ready to receive the forthcoming onslaught.

"I thought you had been killed," growled the Colonel. "What is this talk of new gas that the British are using? I have just had a confidential message through from Army Headquarters reminding me for the third time see that every man has his gas helmet on."

"Since the matter will soon be public property, Colonel," replied Von Weddenheim with a smile, "I may as well take you into the secrets of the General Staff. The British intend supporting this attack by the release of huge quantities of gas, probably a new kind of gas. The gas is being brought up to their front line in tanks, which I have seen with my own eyes during a visit I made a few weeks ago to England."

"Gas in tanks? What advantage is there in that?" asked the puzzled German Colonel. "Suppose there isn't a favourable wind to carry the gas over into our lines, and it looks as though the weather is settled?"

"In that case I can only suggest that one of the reasons for this method of loosing gas," said Von Weddenheim, struck by a brilliant idea, "is that the tank itself contains some projecting apparatus which throws it into our line."

"There may be something in that," said the Colonel thoughtfully. "Anyway, we shall know for certain soon. Listen to the devils. We have been living in hell upon earth for the past five days. Who was the fool that said that the British had no artillery and that, if they had, they couldn't use it?"

He turned to his adjutant.

"Send a message to all the company and battalion commanders that the British are expected to use the tanks of gas in the early morning. Gas masks must be personally inspected by company officers, who will report to me and be held personally responsible that all precautions are taken against gas."

Unexpected Developments.

Von Weddenheim sat outside the little cottage which served as headquarters, and overlooked the white road which runs up from Combles. Ahead of him, in the hazy distance, half revealed and half concealed by the break of dawn, were the blackened stalks of Delville Wood. Overhead droned the aeroplanes of the enemy and dominating all senses was the ceaseless thunder and thud of guns, the everlasting quiver of exploding shells. Suddenly he heard a sharp voice say something inside the cottage, and went in.

"They're over," said the Colonel grimly.

"They have attacked?"

The other nodded.

"Attacked in full force. There's no talk of any gas so far. At least, I have had no report. I've only one wire working. Those infernal shells have broken the others."

"No gas?" said Weddenheim in surprise.

"Not so far as I can hear," said the Colonel. He walked to the telephone as a green indicator fell over.

"Hullo! Hullo! Yes? Yes, it is I, the Colonel.... They are using what? .... Speak up, please. Tell me what they are using."

He waited in silence, but there came no reply.

"The line is cut," he said, turning a troubled face to Von Weddenheim.

"What does he say, sir?"

"He says that the British are using—a word I could not catch."

"He didn't speak of gas?"

"No, no, no, no!" said the other impatiently. "It was something like 'waggon.' Go up into the front line. The

communications trench is immediately behind here; see for yourself."

He peered up through his periscope, and then, disdaining all cover, leaped to the top with an oath. A thin mist lay on the ground, and through this men were running, and they were his own men. They were running like people possessed of terror. Some carried no arms: some flung off their accoutrements as they came.

"Stop! Stop!" roared the commander. "Stop, curse you. Swine pigs. What are you doing?"

Fire-Spitting Monsters.

So much Von Weddenheim heard, standing in the comparative security of the trench below, and then he saw the battalion commander crumple and fall. He raced up the trench towards the front line. Whatever else he was, he was no coward. He met some men who were tumbling blindly back, men who were incoherent with fear and could tell him nothing. A few of these he gathered together, pushed them into a switch trench, and waited. The men were babbling excitedly about some beast which had come out of the morning, crushing all opposition, walking its way through the wire, spitting death and destruction to all who stood in its path.

"You're mad, mad, all of you!" shouted Von Weddenheim. "Stand to the parapet—I'll shoot the first man that bolts! We shall see! You're suffering from illusions. You have been frightened by a transport waggon. Yes, curse you, by an ambulance."

He was looking over the top of the parapet as he spoke, a revolver in his hand, his eyes glued upon the little rise of ground immediately ahead of him.

Then suddenly an apparition loomed.

A great bulk, terrific and terrifying, nosed through the mist, a-flicker with flame, like some mythical beast spitting fire. Von Weddenheim stood hypnotized, spellbound, as this monstrous thing waddled forward, lifting itself, as it seemed, upon invisible hind legs to overcome any obstacle which opposed it, and came smashing down astride of the trench he held. He watched, fascinated, the swing of the machine-gun that came round to cover him. The

hammer-stroke of the guns came from the right, which was now behind him, but above all local sounds, above the rattle of engine or machinery within this menacing shape which straddled the trench, came a voice—

"Hands up, unless you're anxious to die!"

Mechanically Captain Von Weddenheim put up his hands. A steel door in the side of the great engine opened, and a grimy figure stepped out.

"You're the kind of prisoner I want," he said cheerfully. "A staff officer!"

He peered closely at his prisoner's face.

"Jumping Moses! The brother of the dancer!"

He threw back his head and roared with laughter. Then—

"Get inside," he said briskly.

Suddenly a light dawned on Von Weddenheim.

"What is—what is that?" he demanded, and pointed to the palpitating monster that straddled the trench. "What do you call that machine?"

"That is the tank I was talking about," said MacBean.

TALE THE SECOND

"YOU are supporting a Highland division to-day, so be on your best behaviour, Matilda," said Captain MacBean.

He was talking to Tank 69, but Tank 69 was too preoccupied with her own troubles to answer. She was a new tank, a female of the species, and had yet to experience the ordeal of battle. To say that she was spic and span because of her newness would be to misstate facts. She had been in the hands of the camouflage artists, and she was splashed green, yellow, blue, and pink, with large, irregular slabs of black, and she was so completely harmonised with the pleasant wood in which she was hiding waiting to pounce upon her enemy that you might pass her at a few yards' distance without noticing she existed.

The men inside her were anxious. MacBean, her skipper, who betrayed his emotions only by humming

hymn tunes, had his suspicions of her, and from the point of view of the tank crew she had started her career very badly when MacBean, on his preliminary inspection, had begun singing "Hark, the herald angels sing" under his breath.

She moved stiffly, and did not immediately answer her helm, and was inclined to vary her pace without any instructions or movement on the part of the man whose task it was to regulate the speed at which she travelled. Nevertheless, she was a good tank, one of the best that Birmingham had turned out, and if she lacked the balance and the "brain" of the old male tanks with their big guns she had the foot of them for speed in every test which had been applied.

Ahead of the shattered wood and behind a low, irregular ridge lay the German line, heavily protected by a thick belt of barbed wire. The advance could only be made through a shallow neck of ground commanded to the left and right by powerful machine-gun posts, which for two days the artillery, heavy and light, had been plastering with high explosive and shrapnel, but, so far as could be discovered by the patrols, without any effect.

The whole of the foreground was systematically barraged at irregular intervals, and the prospect of the morrow, when the attack was to be made, was by no means a bright one.

"You're going to have a bad time tomorrow, MacBean, I'm afraid," said the Brigadier when the tank officer had reported to the dugout occupied by the Brigade Staff. "Our job is to carry that shoulder on the right, and it can only be carried if we can manage to get on top of those Emma Gees."

"I don't mind the Emma Gees," said MacBean thoughtfully. "After all, that is our speciality. How are they off for anti-tank guns?"

"They've got scores," said the staff officer.

MacBean Makes a Suggestion.

"That's a pretty cheerful outlook," smiled MacBean. "I suppose there's no way of getting through without making a direct attack on the position?"

The Brigadier shook his head.

"We haven't got half enough tanks for the job," he said. "The Government is pushing the construction as fast as they possibly can, but we cannot get any more tanks before the summer, and you've got to do the best you can with your squad."

"What about a night attack?" he said.

The Brigadier was thoughtful.

"It's never been done yet," he said. "Besides, the way is too tricky. There are two sunken roads between you and the position, and the only possible way you can break through into the redoubt at all is by crossing the roads where the banks dip, and for that you want daylight. Look here," he said, indicating the map. "You'll find it bad enough when dawn breaks. You've got to take a zig-zag course, and if you miss your way you'll either be bogged in the marches on the left or get tied up in the sunken road—and you'll be on it before you know where you are."

"Cheerful soul," said MacBean. "Anyway, I'm going to try. And if you'll give me permission, sir, I'll try to-night, a couple of hours before the attack starts."

The Brigadier looked troubled.

"I don't know that I can give you permission to do that, MacBean," he said. "I can't risk the squadron."

"I don't want the squadron, sir," said MacBean. "I'll take 69 and a chance. If my idea works out I shall be

on top of the anti-tank guns before they know, it's so early in the morning, and after that to squash the Emma Gees is work for children."

The Brigadier shook his head again.

"I must consult Corps about this," he said, and went out to the signaller's dugout to call up an unsympathetic Corps Headquarters. He came back in ten minutes, glum of face.

"Corps was all against it at first, although I supported the idea. I don't mind telling you, because I think that anyway the tank attack is going to fail, and it might as well fail in the act of doing something enterprising as to fail in essaying the impossible to-morrow. Zero hour is, as you know, 5.27."

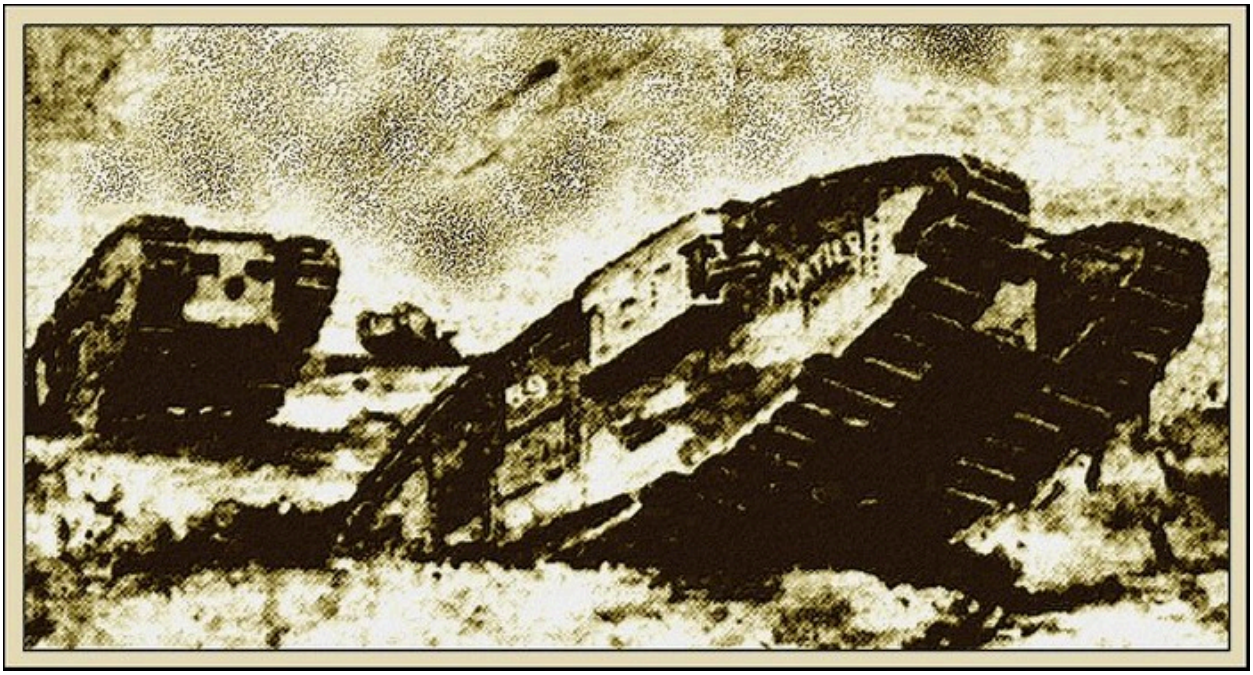
"At zero hour," said Captain MacBean confidently, "I will be sitting on the right machine-gun post sympathizing with the hairy Boche."

The Brigadier smiled.

"As a tank officer you're splendid, MacBean; as a prophet I rather think you are rotten."

"Let the night prove," said MacBean, and went away humming "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

Laying the Plans.



He came back to his tank and entered it, closing the steel door behind him. The crew were waiting his return within the tank's shelter, a necessary precaution because the wood was swept by machine-

guns, and occasionally a shell fell unpleasantly close. The interior of the tank was hot and stuffy. There was a smell of oil and of stale exploded cordite. The men were cramped, and had neither room to move nor stretch their limbs, but after the manner of their kind they were cheerful.

In a few words, spoken in a low tone, for voices carry far across No Man's Land, he outlined his plan.

"The only possible way we can get across is to take a chance at night. Of course, they'll put up star shells, but in that deceptive light it may be possible to escape being hit by an A.T. gun. At 1 a.m. we will go over, push straight for the sunken road, and take our chance of getting into it. We shan't be able to climb the bank at the other side, but if we turn off to the right and get behind the German trenches farther to the south, so far as I know, there's nothing to prevent our working our way up the hill, and coming on the machine-gun posts in reverse. I feel it my duty to tell you that the chances of our getting through and returning are considerably small. I won't ask you whether you're willing to take the risk because I have already asked that question so many times and have taken the trouble to discover that you are all keen. But if there's any man here who doesn't feel like going on with this job why, now is the time for him to stand out like a little man and say frankly that he'd rather take his chance in daylight. I shall send him to another tank and replace him with a volunteer."

But there was none in the little group which listened to him who wanted to do anything but go through with the night attack.

"Our difficulty is going to be to know where to turn off and where to go on straight, and that point at which a change of direction must be made. If there were sign-posts at every corner where we have to turn the job would be a simple one, and it is my job to make those sign-posts!"

A Collection of Mirrors.

The sun was going down and the dusk of the evening was creeping over the earth when MacBean made his way again to Divisional Headquarters. He had a fellow-traveller in a staff officer.

In single file they footed the long communication trench which led back to more open going. When they had struck the road and were able to walk abreast the staff officer said—

"I suppose you know, MacBean, you're taking on a pretty serious job to-night?"

"Serious for me," said MacBean, "but disastrous for the Boche."

"By the way, what were you doing at Headquarters this afternoon?" asked the Brigade Major curiously.

"Just making a plan," said the other airily.

The Brigade Major rubbed his chin.

"By Jove! Did you see that aeroplane which was stunting over No Man's Land?"

MacBean nodded and smiled.

"But what the devil was he doing?" asked the Staff officer. "So far as I could see he wasn't attempting to bomb or machine-gun anybody. He was just dropping junk."

"Right again," said MacBean, and the Staff officer laughed shortly.

"If you are on your way to Divisional Headquarters," he said, "and you're on speaking terms with the General, I do wish you'd find something about the mentality of divisional staffs. Do you know what the blighters did this afternoon—of all the darned nonsense?"

"Haven't the slightest idea," said MacBean.

The Brigade Major, who, like all Brigade Majors, had a standing grievance against Divisional Headquarters, expatiated at large upon the senseless orders and counter-orders that came from that holy of holies, the office of the chief staff officer.

"Why, they sent a requisition round to every battalion in the division ordering every officer and man who was in possession of a mirror immediately to hand it in to brigade! We had instructions to send those mirrors down to Divisional Headquarters."

"And did you?" asked MacBean innocently.

"Why, of course we did," said the indignant Brigade Major. "We sent three waggon loads. What's the idea?

Don't they want us to shave any more, and are we to go out of the trenches looking like nothing on earth? I had to surrender my mirror, and it cost me thirty bob in London."

"You were talking a little earlier about aeroplanes low-flying over No Man's Land and dropping things. Well, the things they were dropping were your mirrors."

The Brigade Major gasped.

"What's the idea?" he asked.

"Man, you wouldn't understand if I told you," said MacBean. "You have to be awfully clever to understand my stunts."

A Puzzled German Staff.

At that moment, less than three miles away and on the wrong side of the line, three German Staff officers sat in the lowest chamber of a deep dugout which Captain MacBean struck from another angle.

Baron Von Treutzer, the Chief of Staff of the 139th Bavarian Division, was particularly puzzled and particularly annoyed. The other two officers, who were of subordinate rank and were not members of the Staff, were equally annoyed, but were not allowed by regulation to display their annoyance in the presence of a superior officer.

"When you say, Lieutenant Ruhl, that you do not understand what the aeroplane was doing you are talking like a fool," said the gallant Baron. "It is your business to know what aeroplanes are doing when they are flying over your lines. He did not machine-gun your posts?"

"No, Herr Baron," said the younger officer, standing stiff as a ramrod. "He neither bombed nor used guns. He just dropped these things at certain parts of the line. I do not understand it."

The Baron picked up from the table a cracked and battered mirror of a conventional kind—one, indeed, which had been taken from a protesting Tommy that very morning.

"Why should they bombard us with looking glasses, I ask you? There is some plot in it."

"Herr Baron," said one of the officers respectfully, "we believe that the British are going to attack to-night or to-morrow."

"How will this help them, I ask you?" demanded the Baron. "Where were these things dropped?"

The senior of the subordinate officers pointed to a little map on which red crosses had been marked.

"Near the dip of the sunken road, Herr Baron," he said, moving his finger along, "on the right bank of the marsh, on the two ends of the causeway, and here away to the right where the hill slopes up from the road to the Danzig Redoubt. My theory is, if the Herr Baron will permit——"

"Say what you think, lieutenant," said the Staff officer graciously.

"My theory is," said the officer, "that the mirrors have been dropped in order to allow the aeroplanes to take accurate observation. Some of these glasses are to reflect the rays of the sun and enable fliers to register the ground."

The Herr Baron nodded.

"There is, of course, that possibility," he said, and nodded thoughtfully. "You will arrange to-night, Lieutenant"—he turned to the younger member—"to send out working parties to cover up these mirrors. It will be a simple matter to shovel earth over them, and I shall hold you responsible for the work being done thoroughly. To-morrow, if our reconnoitering aeroplanes see as much as a glint of glass in your area there will be serious trouble."

The staff officer went back to his comfortable château to report to his General the result of his investigations.

But the covering up of these mirrors, which lay in tiny fragments all over the ground, was not so simple a matter as the Herr Baron had imagined. It seemed that the wicked British, with devilish ingenuity, had foreseen the possibility of the arrival of these working parties, and from the moment dusk fell to well after midnight the British machine-guns never ceased to chatter or the whistle of their bullets to shrill the air above nervous working parties, which spent most of

their time in "No Man's Land" lying flat on their stomachs.

Going Into Action.

MacBean came back from Headquarters remarkably cheery. He had seen the long, long columns of men moving up in the night to take their positions ready to make the attack, and it brought a little glow to his heart to realise that by his forethought he had saved hundreds, probably thousands, of these brave fellows from death or hideous injury.

It was past midnight when he climbed into his tank humming "Onward, Christian Soldiers," which was invariably regarded by the crew as an excellent sign.

"We're not going alone after all," he said; "77 and 102 will accompany us. Sergeant, see that we show two red tail-lights carefully shaded. 77 will do the same, and we'll move in single file."

"Have you got the route, sir?" asked the sergeant.

MacBean nodded and said, "Yes."

The nod was superfluous, because the interior of the tank was in absolute darkness until MacBean flashed a little electric lamp upon his wrist-watch.

"Sit down and sit tight," he said. "Get whatever grub you want, and, Ferdinand"—he addressed the engineer—"if anything goes wrong with your box of tricks we are dead men."

"She ain't what I'd call a good runner," said the cautious Ferdinand, "but, bar accidents, I think we are going to get through."

"Your address will not be in the postal list if you don't," said MacBean, and no further word was spoken.

They sat through the remaining hour of waiting listening to the distant thunder of guns. Once they heard an enemy Gotha drone overhead, and heard the boom of its bursting bombs.

"Billets are getting it to-night," said MacBean. "After all, there are worse little places than a tank on a night like this."

He peered through the observation slit.

"In two minutes," he said, "the artillery will drop a barrage like nothing on earth."

"It'll be rotten for us, though," said the sergeant. "He'll get the guns on us, and open up with all his star shells."

MacBean chuckled.

"Very likely," he said.

"Wouldn't it be better," said the anxious voice of the non-commissioned officer, "if we went over quiet-like without making any kind of fuss?"

"This'll be best, sergeant," said MacBean. "The anti-tank guns won't hit us, except by luck, and it would be just as likely that a Gotha would bomb us where we are as that we should be hit by an anti-tank gun fired into the blue."

"But, sir," said the voice of the sergeant.

"Stand by!" said MacBean's voice sharply. "Tune her up!" This latter was to the engineer.

A Surprise for the Huns.

The infantry were prepared for the apparition. The whole earth shook and trembled under the terrific gunfire which was going on as 69 passed out into No Man's Land with the ghostly light of bursting star-shells and Verey lights.

Shells burst before, behind, and on either side of her; great lurid splashes of flame; tremendous detonations that made the tank tremble. Machine-gun bullets spurted like hail against her thick hide, but 69 went on, and presently she got to the hard road which led to the little village of Floquette. But Floquette was not MacBean's destination. Another hundred yards further on he knew a great gap in the road had been cut which spelt death to a tank.

Oblivious to the bullets which were falling against the nose of the tank, which was faintly visible to the foremost observers of the German lines, MacBean stood peering through the peepholes.

He heard the familiar whine of the anti-tank shells, which necessarily grew wild, because it was almost impossible for the German gunners to get a direct target in that deceptive light. Presently he uttered an

exclamation of satisfaction. Directly ahead of him something glittered, and he turned the tank immediately to the right in time to avoid the first trap. He was now, as he knew, directly ahead of the marsh in which two tanks had already bogged. But he proceeded without hesitation along the untracked path, his eyes fixed ahead to another shimmer and sparkle of light which glittered up from the ground every time a star-shell burst.

Finding the Signposts.

"There is the signpost," he said, and again turned, the tanks in his rear following to the inch.

Three minutes later, in the light of the star-shells the third "turning point" flashed up, and the tank ran rapidly down the declivity which led to the sunken road, where there was a momentary immunity from direct shell-fire. The whole German front was now blazing with light. "S.O.S" signals were rising as far as the eye could see. The enemy was puzzled by what was happening.

MacBean needed no guide now. Star-shells illuminated the road, and he could see quite plainly the barriers which had been erected before the last attack, and which were no longer manned, as the enemy did not think it possible that a push could be made in this direction.

The steep banks of the road were honey-combed with German dugouts and the sleeping quarters of the brigade which was holding this sector. The machine-guns on 69 raked them as she passed. Dark figures leapt out of the darkness and attempted to escape out of range, and were ruthlessly mown down.

"There's the signpost," roared MacBean, pointing ahead where another pool of light flashed and sparkled on the ground.

Ten minutes later three tanks abreast came rumbling up the hillside, smashed through earthen shelters and crushed by their weight the dug-outs where the machine-gunners were waiting for the storm to pass, and came to a halt nose to nose like a gigantic shamrock on the very centre of the Danzig redoubt.

* * * * *

A few months later on a captured prisoner a copy of the following report issued by the Great General Staff was discovered.

> WARNING.—A Scottish Division recently made an attack upon our positions south-west of Cambrai and succeeded in penetrating our lines and capturing a strong post. The attack was remarkable for the fact that it was preceded by an advance of tanks which reached their objective over a difficult course, flanked by marsh and barraged cross-roads, owing to the system adopted by an Englishman named Makbin who caused fragments of mirrors to be dropped by aeroplane at certain crucial points on his route. The Great General Staff impresses upon all divisional and regimental commanders the necessity for dealing with mirrors dropped from aeroplanes and would again call the attention of commanders of anti-tank batteries to the reward of 1000 marks for every tank knocked out and the additional reward of 2000 marks for the capture of British tank 69 commanded by Captain Makbin.

MacBean read this with a little gesture of disgust.

"They've got my nationality all wrong," he said, "but that is to be expected from a country which always depicts Englishmen in kilts. But they might have put a capital B for Bin."

TALE THE THIRD

CAPTAIN MACBEAN had been to Amiens to purchase private stores, and was on his way back to his battalion when Blue Peter hove in sight. Blue Peter could not have recognised Captain MacBean from a height of six thousand feet, and the motor car which carried the tank commander differed in no respect from the motor cars which have carried hundreds of other officers, yet as though sensing the identity of his prey, Blue Peter came swooping down the skies, his machine-gun going viciously.

MacBean, who was driving himself, pulled his car up with a jerk and slipped underneath it. Three times did Blue Peter swoop backward and forward, and the white dust of the road arose in clouds under the patter of his machine-gun bullets. Then a British patrol dropped swiftly over him, and Blue Peter remembered an important engagement he had made to dine that night, and went westward at 130 miles an hour, followed by the British avenger.

Captain MacBean crawled out from beneath his machine as another car which had been speeding along the road pulled up abreast of him.

"Very undignified, but very safe," said MacBean, dusting his clothing.

The staff office in the tonneau grinned.

"It is better to be undignified than dead," he said; "that's the conclusion I arrived at the first day I came to the front. What's Blue Peter got against you?"

"I brought him down once," he said.

"By Jove!" said the staff officer, "you're Captain MacBean, the tank wallah!"

"That's me," said the cheerful MacBean, cranking up and climbing into his car.

The feud between Blue Peter and Tank 69 (which latter had been christened Dogface by its admiring crew, and now bore that title legibly inscribed on its bows) was of four weeks' standing. Blue Peter had been the terror of the front line. It was his practice to come at dawn and sweep along the trenches, spraying

bullets into the rough, temporary line which the British were holding.

One morning he had come as usual to strafe, and had found himself under a concentrated machine-gun fire from what to him had appeared to be a mound of earth, but what on closer examination proved to be an unexpected tank, unexpected because tanks do not as a rule sojourn in the front line except in moments of battle excitement.

The Feud.

With the struts shot through and a couple of bullets through his petrol tank Blue Peter managed to flop just behind his own lines, and in some miraculous fashion to escape the intensive bombardment which was immediately opened on the place where he had landed. He had been close enough to 69 to see her number, and a week later Blue Peter (so called because his wings were painted sky blue) came looking for 69, this time with a couple of bombs, which he dropped a little too close to MacBean's lawful abode and habitation to be pleasant.

A week after this there was a push, and 69 ate its way through half a mile of barbed wire, climbed over the top of a redoubt, negotiated a tank trap, and having climbed a wall, sat upon a machine-gun nest, and was apparently identified by Blue Peter from the skies and attacked. This time Blue Peter, who was on more important duty than tank-strafing, carried no bombs, but his machine-gun fire was very effective, and, since a tank's weakness is its roof and the greatest danger to its crew is to be found in small-arm fire from above, MacBean had rather a trying time until one of our own scouts engaged the attacker and drove him off.

MacBean walked over to the Headquarter office, and he was whistling thoughtfully, the tune being "Glad was my heart to hear."

He had returned to discover operation orders for a limited attack on the following day. Colonel Swaney, a grim-looking gentleman of such rugged and elusive exterior as to suggest that he himself had been created from a tank model, had a few words of advice to offer.

"I want you to take 69 beyond the objectives," he said; "in fact, if you could get into La Bassée-Bas I should be grateful. There's a brigade headquarters there, and we believe that the German has got a large underground dump."

MacBean nodded.

"That's the quarry village, isn't it?" he asked.

"That's the place," said the Colonel. "It's simply honey-combed with caves, and the German has entrances on the reverse slope of the hill, which means that he is safe from direct fire. If, as we think, the caves are full of munitions, it is very necessary that we should do something to deplete the German's supply."

"What do you want me to do, sir?" asked MacBean. "Take the tank along and blow myself up?"

"Something like that," said the Colonel.

The village of La Bassée-Bas lay in a hollow amidst a girdle of hills, the slopes of which had at one time been densely covered with trees. The exact nature of the ground was known to "Intelligence," and, indeed, might be learnt from an examination of the ordinary section maps supplied to the troops in line. What was not known for sure was the changes which had been effected during the German occupation. This was a country into which the British Army had not penetrated since 1914. There was a great gravel pit somewhere on the reverse slope, and a report had been received from prisoners that the Germans had been taking thousands of tons of gravel for the making of their roads, so that the configuration of the ground could not be exactly as it was shown upon the map.

Aeroplane reconnaissance had supplied a certain amount of information. It was known that the pit had been deepened and that the country face had been considerably altered, but aeroplane photographs, excellent as they are, have their deficiencies, as MacBean pointed out.

"I don't want to find myself wandering into a gravel pit," he said. "Between the point of attack and the village of La Bassée the ground drops six hundred feet, and I don't want to find myself wandering about La Bassée-Bas trying to discover a way out."

"The roads are pretty good," said the Colonel, "and the gradients are not difficult. You ought to have no difficulty in negotiating the slope with 69, which is the most powerful tank of the squadron."

"Between what ought to be and what will be," said Captain MacBean, "there is a vast difference," but he said this to himself.

Preparing for a Strange Expedition.

He was content to salute and go back to make the preparations for the morning fight. There is a grim sameness about all attacks. The same sleepless nights spent in conning operation orders, in scanning maps, in examining for the tenth and twentieth time engines, machine-guns, and the like.

At three minutes to five, the barrage fell over the German positions, and Tank 69 moved forward from the position it had taken up in the night, and waddled out into No Man's Land. The Germans had reinforced their artillery; the ground smoked and roared with high explosive shell; and the thin mist, which was a feature of all morning attacks, was torn and shattered in the hideous racket.

MacBean peered through the lookout, and sent 69 forward unerringly to its goal. He lumbered across deserted trenches, stopped for a while to wreck the entrance to a dugout, then pushed across the mangled earth, threading his way between shell craters, till he struck what had the appearance of being open country. But battlefield appearances are invariably deceptive. A perfectly innocent-looking clump of bushes vomited flame and fury, a gentle and inviting knoll broke into smoke, and the steel sides of 69 rattled like a castanet in the hail of nickel.

MacBean was humming "There is a land beyond the river," and his eyes were fixed upon the pock-marked road along which 69 was lurching at a furious gait. The road skirted the slope of the hill, crossed the neck, and fell steeply down the other side toward the village.

He had left the battle behind him, and was now well into the blue. Every minute he was sighting the massed reserves which lay under cover of the undulating ground—masses which sometimes broke, but which more often went flat on their stomachs to

avoid his machine-guns. But his business was not with the infantry, though he never neglected the target they presented. He was out looking for the caves behind the hill, and presently he saw them, irregular scars skilfully camouflaged, but indubitably entrances to the Germans' subterranean storehouses. To see them was to know their strength and the impossibility of carrying out his instructions. An anti-tank gun, or it may have been an isolated field gun, opened on him at close range, yet not so close that he could rush and crush it out of existence.

Then, from some hidden hollow, another gun opened on him. Above the thunder of his engines he heard the whine of the shell as it came past his "bows."

"This is where we go home," said Captain MacBean and turned the tank about.

Fortunately the ground was of such a nature that he was able to secure cover from both guns, but the real danger came when he was again approaching the battle-line, and it was not represented by the furious bomb attack which met him as he emerged to the left rear of the Germans' support line, but by Blue Peter.

This time Blue Peter had bombs, but as against that 69 had an A.A. machine gun designed by MacBean, and fitted in the steel roof. The trap in the roof was pulled open, and the nose of the Lewis gun poked out. Blue Peter in the act of swooping swerved a little. He was probably hit by MacBean's first few shots, and that swerve saved 69 from destruction. The bomb that fell must have been something in the nature of a two hundred pounder, for its detonation jarred every plate in the machine.

When the dust settled MacBean had put a considerable distance between himself and the crater, but Blue Peter was hanging on and again dropped, this time directly. The machine-guns spat and spluttered, and once more the aeroplane swerved and once more missed its mark.

The bomb dropped near enough to lift the rear of the tank and pitch its crew forward, but 69 was uninjured, and before Blue Peter could return to the attack the watchful British scouts were again making his life a burden and a misery.

The Persistent Blue Peter.

MacBean got back to his departure position, now a long way behind the original British line, and made his report to the Brigadier.

"The caves are there all right," he said, "but until you invent a new kind of tank you'll never get near them. The entrances are covered by anti-tank guns, and I thought I saw evidence of a trap."

"How does the road run? Did you notice any particular change in the valley?"

"I couldn't see the valley," confessed MacBean, "but certainly I saw no gentle gradients. It looked to me as though the ground fell away rapidly."

"Then that's where the gravel pit is," said the Brigadier, making a cross upon his map, "and it's obvious we shall have to get round or we shall find ourselves held up on the edge of a sheer drop. They telephoned me that you had a fight with Blue Peter?"

MacBean smiled.

"That pilot is a great fellow," he said. "How he recognises me Heaven knows, but I never go into action without he sees me, and, seeing me, marks me down for destruction."

A proof of the extraordinary tenacity and perseverance of Blue Peter was furnished the following morning, when 69 was pursuing its leisurely way back to the depot for refitment. Again Blue Peter appeared from nowhere, and again came screaming down from the skies, two machine-guns plastering the roof of the tank, which was perforated in a dozen places. A bullet struck a bright steel part, ricocheted with a hum like an angry bee, passed MacBean's ear, tore an ugly gash in the arm of a machine-gunner, and finally flatted against the inside wall of the tank. Another ricocheted against MacBean's steel helmet, which he had put on, and for a moment knocked him senseless. By the time he had got his cap open and his gun out Blue Peter was "steeple-chasing" homeward, surrounded by white balls of bursting shrapnel, which indignant anti-aircraft gunners were sending after him.

That same night MacBean received some interesting information. The Colonel strolled into the

mess after dinner.

Von Weddenheim on the Scene Again.

"By the way, MacBean," he said, "do you remember some time ago capturing an officer of the German Intelligence Department—Baron Von something or other?"

"Of course," said MacBean. "I met him in London, and he was with a girl who was supposed to be his sister. His name was Von Weddenheim, and he was doing a little bit of high-class spying. How is the gentleman? The last time I heard or him he was en route to an English prison camp."

"If you kept yourself more up-to-date in the gossip of the camps, my lad," said the Colonel, "you would have learned that he was one of the four men who escaped from Donington Hall, and the only one who is not recaptured."

"You don't mean to tell me——" gasped MacBean.

"I mean to tell you," said the Colonel, "that the pilot of Blue Peter is the annoyed Baron, who reached Germany in the middle of 1917, chucked up his Staff appointment, and joined the Imperial German Flying Service. He is known in Germany as the Tank Strafer."

He took a paper out of his pocket, opened it on the table, and adjusted his pince-nez.

"But I didn't know that he specialised in tanks," said MacBean. "I thought at first it was a coincidence that he came after me, but I had never heard that he made a specialty of us."

The Colonel nodded.

"That's just what he does do," he said. "I have a record here of four tanks that he's actually knocked out, twelve tanks that he's practically laid up in dock, and about 65 distinct attacks upon tanks, excluding those which he has made upon you."

"You don't think it's a coincidence that he's after me?"

The Colonel shook his head.

"I think it is very natural and easily explained," he said. "Von Weddenheim was one of the cracks of German Intelligence, and although he's flying he is

still in touch with his old department, and you may be sure he's getting fairly accurate information, not only as to the movements of tanks, but as to their personnel. I should imagine he has taken a lot of trouble to identify 69 and to find out 69's commander. From what I have heard, he's pretty sore against you, MacBean, and if you will take my tip you'll let it be known widely that you have given up 69 and retired to your farm in Scotland."

MacBean made a noise indicating his derision at the suggestion.

"The only thing for me to do," he said, "is to get Blue Peter and thoroughly and systematically strafe him."

The Colonel smiled.

"Do you suggest having a pair of wings fitted and going up after him?"

"Nothing like that," replied MacBean.

The knowledge that Von Weddenheim was controlling Blue Peter added a new zest and interest to life. Hitherto Blue Peter had merely been an annoying interlude, but now he came into the first rank of MacBean's multifarious interests.

Sixty-nine was thoroughly overhauled, repainted, and recamouflaged, and when next 69 went to war the Blue Peter came flipping over the tree tops to attack—apparently undeceived by the tank's new guise—the Vickers protested so emphatically and effectively that Blue Peter did not wait to continue the argument.

For a week MacBean was on the look-out for his enemy. It was as strenuous week, for the attack which had sent him over in search of the quarry dumps had only partially succeeded. We had pressed our line forward in certain places; on another sector we had had to give ground, and there was a phase of the battle when at different parts of the line the British and Germans were attacking at the same time, and the flanks of both attacking parties were in the air. So that whilst the line had gone forward on the sector where MacBean had attacked, it had gone backward to the left, and was now in a position which could not endure.

There were two ways of regulating the situation. The first involved small local attacks for the rectification of the line, and the second a general attack which would mop up the German salient, and either produce the grand result or would compel the British commander to retire his old line to a depth of two kilometres. The commander decided upon the grand attack, and on a dull, drizzly morning the troops went over, reached their first objectives like the rain lovers they were, with little or no opposition, and drove up against the German second line with irresistible fury.

The Fate of Blue Peter.

Sixty-nine slipped and slithered on the surface mud, led the way to a cheering battalion through the deep wire, and at ten o'clock in the morning was fighting a solitary battle with a battalion of German infantry and a battery of anti-tank guns, which, happily for MacBean's future, were put out of action by a well-directed 6-inch salvo. The weather had cleared. The sun was shining hotly, and the ground was drying when MacBean decided upon making another attempt to reach the quarry caves overlooking La Bassée-Bas.

He stopped on his way to crush a machine-gun post which was holding up the Australians, and then pushed on along the road, recognising the tracks he had made on his last visit. Then, as inevitable as fate, came Blue Peter. The machine seemed to rise from the earth and appear suddenly before him.

"There's a steep bit over there," roared MacBean in the ear of his sergeant, pointing ahead. "Did you see how he came up out of the ground"?

The sergeant nodded.

Blue Peter was sweeping round the tank in wide circles, and for a wonder his machine-gun was quiet.

"Bombs are nothing," said MacBean, but in this he was mistaken, because Blue Peter made no attempt to rise above him, and seemed only intent upon keeping out of the way of MacBean's Vickers.

That officer himself was behind the gun, and after a few preliminary shots, he stood waiting and watching as the tank rumbled forward to its objective.

Then a strange thing happened. The aeroplane began to wobble and to fall like a piece of paper. It avoided a pancake by its pilot putting the nose down, and came to rest on the solid ground about 150 yards ahead of the tank. Its propeller was still ticking, and it was moving slowly. MacBean's eyes blazed with excitement.

"By jove, we've got it!" he said. "I said I'd crash Blue Peter, and I'm going to do it."

He turned the head of the tank in the direction of the crippled plane. Nearer and nearer he came, a sense of exultation and finality in his heart. It was not the pilot whose destruction he desired, it was the plane and the satisfaction of claiming that his tank had walked over this swift flyer of the air.

The aeroplane was moving spasmodically in little jerks, but continuing in one direction. Strangely enough, the pilot made no attempt to escape. He still sat in his seat, and MacBean could see him turning his head from time to time. Sixty-nine was not twenty yards away. Her machine-guns might have settled accounts with Von Weddenheim then and there, but MacBean's mind was intent upon the method of Blue Peter's destruction. He was less than ten yards from the tail of the plane when his hair rose and he had a premonition of appalling danger. The earth was trembling beneath him, and then he saw. The nose of the aeroplane was overhanging a cliff. He realised the trick. With her engine still running Blue Peter could afford to take the risk of a dive, and even as the thought flashed through MacBean's mind Blue Peter's tractor roared round at full speed. The aeroplane leaped forward over the edge of the cliff.

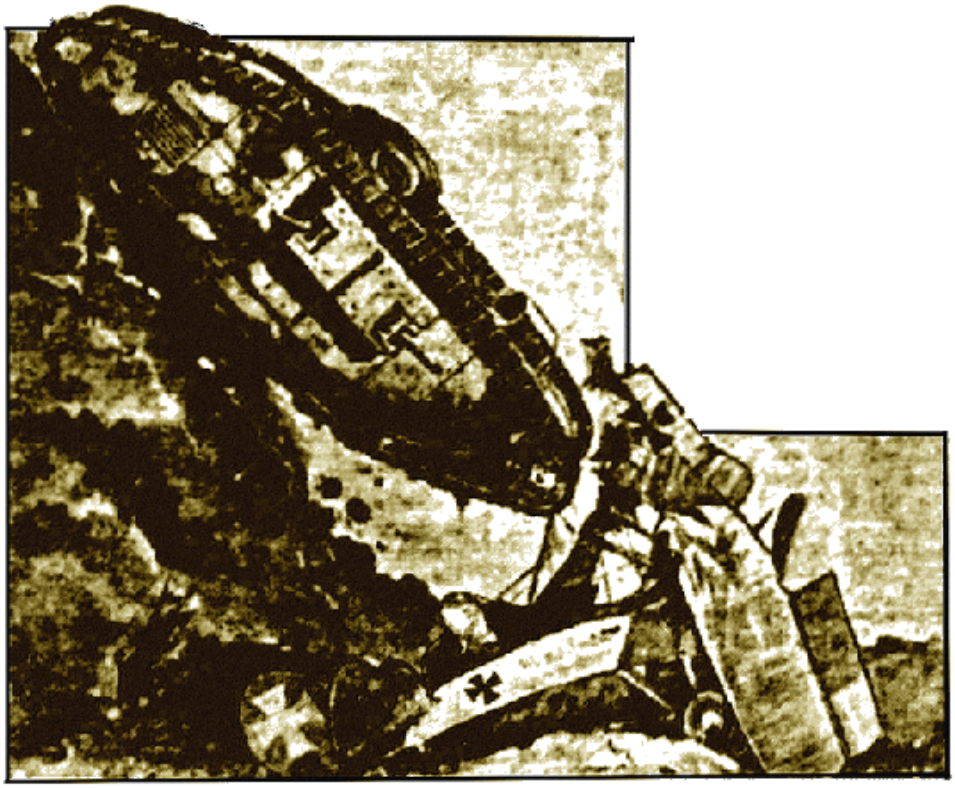
Sixty-nine's engines were stopped instantly, but it was too late. In the fraction of a second he felt the ground crumbling beneath him, and knew that the tank was resting on an overhanging shelf of the earth —and then 69 dropped.

MacBean held on like grim death as the great steel machine plunged, nose downwards, into space.

But something else was happening. Blue Peter's engines had cut out, and its pilot, misjudging distance, had brought the nose of his aeroplane round too sharply, so that the wings caught the smooth side

of the gravel pit and buckled. Together they fell, aeroplane and tank, but it was the aeroplane which had reached the earth first, for she had gone down before the tank had taken the plunge.

Then MacBean felt a gentle shock, for 69 had leaped as a ski jumper leaps, and by a miracle had landed on the steep slope of the gravel pit. The shingly surface broke the fall, but down, down, down plunged 69, out of all control, sliding and slipping, but uninjured. And beneath her was the wreckage of Blue Peter.



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An hour later, when khaki battalions swarmed down the slope and carried La Bassée-Bas at the point of the bayonet, a rescue party released MacBean and his bruised crew, and brought them back to headquarters.

"Well," said the colonel, "how did you get on, MacBean?"

"I crashed Blue Peter," said MacBean proudly.

"Crashed Blue Peter? How?"

"We had a great fight in the air," said MacBean, "and literally I came out on top."

He did not mention the fact that Von Weddenheim had escaped destruction, because he was looking

forward to making a special report on Von Weddenheim's end at a future date.

TALE THE FOURTH

"THERE'S something in my bones," said Captain MacBean as he surveyed 69 thoughtfully, "which tells me that you are not long for this world, old bean."

There was no reason why he should take this alarming view of 69's future, for never had the pet tank of the squadron been running so smoothly and so sweetly, and never was she so obedient to the controlling brain as in this September week, when the enemy's main opposition had been crushed, the Hindenburg Line had been crossed, and there was only the "forest line" to negotiate.

69 had borne a charmed life. She had taken a ricocheting shell at a tangent and had not suffered in the process, and in the pride of her new camouflage she stood by the side of the road waiting to move forward. Though she was four miles from the enemy line the ground reverberated to the incessant and heavy cannonade.

Speyer, commander of 24 T. stood by MacBean's side.

"You're saying very discouraging words to your little nine-seater," he said. "What makes you think you are going through it? Are you psychic?"

MacBean shook his head.

"Has your stock of hymn tunes dried up?"

The other laughed.

"No; it is just what the Americans call a hunch," he said. "Why it should be so I don't know, because Corps has passed the word that tanks will not be employed either to-day or to-morrow."

"It's a rum kind of fighting," said Speyer thoughtfully, "and yet it has a fascination of its own. I wish the dear old ladies who congratulate me upon having a safe job would have a look at 24 T. when she's gliding into that fascinating three-step, the Tank Trap Hesitation Waltz, and if I am not mistaken one part of your premonition is coming off."

He nodded down the road, where a motor cyclist was pelting towards them in a cloud of dust. The messenger pulled up, sprang from his machine, standing it erect with a jerk of its legs which loosed its supports, and came towards the other two officers with that waddling walk which is the preliminary of cramped motor cyclists.

MacBean took the telegram he offered, opened it, and read it.

"Go forward and attack G.X.9C. Machine Gun Post. See Operation Map 12 K.Y.638," he read.

He put the telegram in his pocket, signed the cyclist's book, and took from a wallet a large map.

"I thought our line was beyond there," he said. "That looks like a pretty hefty machine-gun post, Speyer. You see how the hills dip steeply. It must be a frontal attack or nothing."

"Cheerio," said the other. "Better you than me, I have a wife and family and many responsibilities which I cannot talk about in public."

On Another Stunt Again.

MacBean went back to 69, made a final inspection, and climbed aboard, and two minutes later he was rumbling along the high road which led to the steaming battle-line. He had to turn at a cross-road to reach a point immediately opposite that where the attack was to be delivered, and to avoid what was already known as the O.B.L. (old British line). Here in the shelter of a cut road he received further instructions, and those instructions were to wait.

"We don't know what's ahead of us," said the staff officer who brought the order. "So far as we can tell, it's perfectly straight going and open country, but the patrols believe that a broad belt has been heavily mined. A low-flying aerial reconnaissance has failed to detect any evidence of mines, but that's nothing. They take some detecting from machines going at ninety miles an hour."

MacBean climbed out of the tank and made his way to a slight eminence which gave him a view of the battlefield. The horizon as far as the eye could reach was smoking darkly. In the middle distance was a tiny

village which by some miracle had escaped destruction. The staff officer who accompanied him drew his attention to the fact.

"We pushed Jerry back before he was ready to destroy the place," he said. "His line is well behind the village. In fact, he hadn't time to evacuate the civilians, and they are coming back now."

He pointed to a number of dark specks straggling along the road laden with their household goods, some pushing hand-barrows, some hurrying along unimpeded.

"You will find quite a bunch of them in the valley behind Brigade Headquarters," said the officer. "Do you speak French?"

MacBean nodded.

"Well, it wouldn't be bad idea if you did a little intelligence work on your own," said the officer. "We shan't ask them to leave for an hour, until the engineer patrols have completed their reconnaissance."

MacBean strolled back across the stubble field to the point which the staff officer's whip had indicated. There was very little shelling being done by the German. He was confining himself to a long-range bombardment by high velocity guns. And only occasionally did the roar of a passing shell shake the equanimity of the tank officer.

The Missing Child.

In the shelter afforded by a steep slope he found a dozen families sorting out their effects and congratulating themselves excitedly on their escape from bondage. One member of the party stood aloof—a poor Frenchwoman, quite young, whose ivory complexion and black hair marked her as a Southerner. She was walking restlessly to and fro toward each newcomer, questioning them excitedly. It was in one of those journeys that she came face to face with MacBean. She looked at him, hesitated for a moment, and then—

"Pardon, monsieur," she said. "Have you come from the village?"

He shook his head.

"We are not in the village yet, madam," he replied in French, "but we shall be there within an hour."

"It was all so sudden," she said. "Last night the Boches were with us. An officer was quartered in our house. We had no idea that the British were so near. This morning at daybreak we heard the tramping of feet, and saw them marching out of the eastern end of the village. All night we had heard them walking about, and their officers giving directions, but we did not think they were going so soon. They your officer came and told us we must leave at once, because the Boches would shell the village."

"It is a fortunate day for you," said MacBean conventionally.

"My sister and I were the last to leave," she went on without noticing his interruption. "We lived there with our aunt, my sister and I and my baby. My husband is a *chasseur alpin*, and I have not seen him for three years. Our little boy was born the day the war broke out."

"I am glad you have escaped," said MacBean, who was less anxious to hear stories of domestic suffering than to get some information on such solid matters as tank traps. "Perhaps madame will tell me if she saw the Boches digging narrow trenches across the road and filling them up with steel cylinders?"

She shook her head.

"That I cannot tell, monsieur," she said, "but it is of Lizette that I would ask. She was to bring my boy along. We left him asleep to the last, but in the hurry I missed her. She was a tall girl, dressed in black, and little Pierre is a child of three years——"

She was staring over his shoulder at a young girl who had rounded the shoulder of the hillock. With no other word she flew to meet her. MacBean heard the excited exchange of question and answer, and, his curiosity piqued as to the fate of little Pierre, he strolled toward them. One glance at the woman's tragic face told him the story long before he could distinguish the details of the conversation.

"But, Lizette, I left him with you."

"I swear you told me that you would take him."

The woman turned with a wail to MacBean.

"He is there, he is there!" she cried. "He is alone in the village. Mon Dieu! I must go to him."

She raced along the road, but was stopped by a sentry, and MacBean followed her.

"Nobody is allowed to go back, sir," said the guard. "The village is mined."

"But I must, I must," she cried, when MacBean had translated the man's words. "My little boy is there. He sleeps till late. My sister forgot to bring him."

"Stay here," commanded MacBean. "I will go and make inquiries."

A Novel Plan.

By good fortune he came upon the Brigade Staff squatting in the shelter of a wall, for now the German had brought a battery of machine-guns into action, and was sweeping the fore-field with remarkably good aim.

"She certainly can't go back," said the Brigadier, "but I will send a message forward to the engineers and ask them to search the houses for the child. It is a much bigger village than you'd imagine, but I suppose the woman can tell us pretty nearly where the house stands."

This proved to be the one thing the woman could not tell. She knew it well enough. It was house behind the *estaminet*. She could not point it out on the map of the village, which proved to be less helpful than they had imagined. By this time she was incoherent with terror and apprehension. MacBean took her back to the refugees, and tried to find somebody who could supplement the woman's disjointed description.

A local inhabitant trying to describe the situation of a house in such a jigsaw puzzle of a place as the village of Petit Éloise is apt to be confusing; and when ten voluble Frenchmen were endeavouring to be helpful, and each was discovering a landmark, the existence of which the other nine denied, it was a hopeless task.

MacBean went back to the General.

"The only thing I can suggest, sir," he said, "is that if you intend sending me in the direction of the village you let the woman take a chance and come with me."

The Brigadier shook his head.

"I have marked you down to go through the village," he said, "but it is pretty sure to be a dangerous job. I don't like the woman taking the risk. Jerry has been spending the whole of the night preparing the place, which is full of delayed action mines, and I have just heard by telephone that every attempt on the part of our scouts to enter the village has been met by machine-gun fire from both flanks. That rather looks as though the place will go up at any minute. Otherwise they wouldn't attempt to prevent our men going in to look for the mines. No, I think we must give Petit Éloise a wide berth for the time being, and work round on both sides."

He thought a moment.

"The only thing in favour of your suggestion is that the woman might be able to guide us," he said. "I don't believe the fore-field is very heavily mined, and the patrol reports that there are no tank traps they can find, except that they are pretty certain that near the entrance to the village there is a particularly bad mine barrage to cross."

He ran his finger over the map.

The Mined Approaches.

"There are three ways into the village. There is this path, this cart track which goes round the old convent, and there's this road which comes round the cemetery. To all these villages there are usually two or three ways which are not marked on the map, and here the woman could be of assistance. Go and ask her."

MacBean found the girl calmer.

"It is impossible for the moment, madame, to enter the village," he said. "All the approaches are covered by the enemy's machine-guns."

Very wisely he did not tell her of the General's suspicion that the house had been mined.

"But perhaps," he went on, "it may be possible for my machine to find a way into the village."

"Your machine?" she asked.

"I command a tank."

"A tank?" she said wonderingly.

MacBean realized that these people who had lived within sound of the guns for four years had never yet seen a British tank, and briefly he explained its function.

"If madame will accompany me," he said, "she may be able to guide me into the village."

"There are three roads——" she began.

"I know," he replied; "but those are the three roads I wish to avoid. Is there another way of reaching the village besides the roads?"

She shook her head.

"Everywhere there are stone walls to the fields. If you could overcome them it is possible to get into the very centre of the village through the curé's orchard. And even then there are trees which you must cut down."

"Neither stone walls nor trees will stop us," he said; "but is madame prepared to take the risk of guiding us?"

"Why, surely, monsieur," she said eagerly, "if you will let me go with you! Oh monsieur, it's terrible to think of little Pierre all alone, and at any moment the guns may begin shelling the village and he asleep!"

The Mother Goes as a Guide.

And so Tank 69, to its amazement, found itself charged with a passenger. The girl looked at the queer machine with wondering eyes, saw its sprawling camouflage, and walked about its bulky exterior with open mouth before MacBean assisted her through the narrow door and made her as comfortable as possible in its smelly interior.

She was all impatience to be gone, and could not understand why this great steel hull should not plunge forward into the innocent-looking country without further delay. Ten minutes passed, half-an-hour, forty-five minutes, and the girl was fast losing control, when the order came, and 69 moved forward across the sky-line and dipped down the slope, crashing through a wire fence, straddling a ditch, and climbing a chalky slope on the other side. As though the appearance of 69 were a signal the rim of the

landscape broke into flame. Big geysers of earth leaped up before and behind the tank, the air was white with bursting shrapnel, and the familiar rattle of machine gun bullets against the steel hide of the tank sounded like castanets.

Sixty-Nine was not the sole objective. To left and right long lines of khaki figures were moving forward at a leisurely pace—painfully slow it seemed to those who observed the advance from a distance—and behind the first line came another wave, and behind that another. To the rear of the infantry ten batteries of British guns opened up suddenly on unsuspecting targets. Overhead three spotter 'planes wheeled in wide circles, checking the fire of the guns below, whilst above them, poised in the blue so high that they were little flashing specks to the earthly observer, moved a chaser flight.

MacBean, through the aperture, kept his eye fixed on the village. No shells were falling there, he observed, and that was ominous. He brought the machine onto the battered road with its fringe of smashed poplars, gingerly tested a culvert, and passed over a tiny stream in safety, and found himself looking straight down a long vista of shell-shattered trees into the heart of the village itself. A low flying aeroplane chased curiously up and down the road looking for undiscovered traps, and MacBean's sergeant kept his eye glued upon this in readiness for the signal that danger had been discovered.

The tank commander was humming "Rock of Ages" under his breath, and in his heart was a revival of the fear which he had experienced that morning. He looked round at the girl, who was holding tightly to a stanchion, peering ahead through the narrow slit, pale and terrified by her sudden irruption into the heart of grisly war, and smiled encouragingly. That look of his must have reassured her, for, although her lips drooped pathetically, she smiled back. Presently they reached the zone which was swept by the covering machine guns.

"They'll have A.T. guns here," yelled MacBean in his sergeant's ear, and the non-com nodded.

His expectations were fully realised. Something "whooshed" past the nose of the machine, struck a stump of a tree, and left it frayed as an old tooth-

brush. Another shell carried away the tackle which was stored on the top of the tank. A third hit a projecting steel shutter and ripped it off as though it were paper, but happily this shell did not explode.

They were nearing the village now, and the sergeant touched MacBean's shoulder and pointed. The aeroplane was shooting out little black puffs of powder.

"There's the trap," said MacBean.

He bent down and talked into the girl's ear.

"We must leave the road now," he said. "Which is the best way to reach the curé's orchard?"

She pointed out the direction, and 69 left the road, mounted a bank (MacBean heard the girl's gasp of surprise and felt her hand clutch his arm to steady herself), and waddled through a cabbage field, smashed through a wooden fence, demolished a little toolhouse which stood in its track, and dodged into a patch of ground thickly covered with stunted apple trees.

An Exciting Trip.

The orchard was not as easy to negotiate as MacBean had anticipated. The trees were old and tough, but happily they had been planted between avenues broad enough for his purpose, and, once the first entanglements were overcome—and it needed considerable skill and ingenuity to overcome them—the way was fairly smooth until a wall was reached.

The wall proved to be six feet high, and had evidently been built by the curé to foil the predatory instincts of the village youth. But if it was high it was not very thick, and 69, after one blow which jarred the girl terribly, punched its way through the brickwork, slipped down a bank into a kitchen garden, and found itself with nothing between the village and its own blunt nose but a further wall, lower and easily surmountable.

MacBean was preparing to take this obstacle when the first of the mines blew up. Ahead of him was a little church, and whilst he was bringing the head of the machine to bear upon the wall there was a deafening roar, a flurry of black smoke, and the air

was filled with flying fragments of brick and wood and iron. The dust was so thick that it was impossible to see for a moment, but when it had settled all that remained of the church was a drooping girder which had once been a constituent of its steeple, half a broken wall, and a pall of smoke.

"Number one," said MacBean philosophically, and patted the girl on the shoulder.

She was shaking in every limb as she pointed the way. The tank pushed through into the village street as the second house went up in smoke and flame. This time it was at the far end of the thoroughfare. She pointed to a broad side street which was bisected with other and narrower streets. He turned the tank, and as he did so two houses went up simultaneously, and he found himself pushing blindly through a fog of dust.

The house she indicated was the last but one in the broad street. Obedient to her direction the tank moved on. There was one tall building which MacBean afterwards discovered was the façade of the new convent—a girls' school extensively patronised by the middle classes of the north of France. The tank was abreast of this building when there came a tremendous report, more deafening than any they had heard. Something crashed down on the top of the machine and stopped it. The whole façade had collapsed across the road, half-burying 69 in a heap of smoking rubble. Again they had to wait till the dust had settled, and then MacBean made a rapid reconnaissance. The engine was started, and with a heave and a push the indomitable 69 climbed out of its grave, swayed and struggled through twisted girders and shattered machinery, and came again within sight of its goal.

The house still stood, and MacBean was singing, appropriately enough, "Where is my Wandering Boy To-Night?" when he turned the bow of his machine to face the house.

The girl stepped out of the tank, oblivious to danger, and dashed to the door. It was locked. The windows were barred, and there was no other entrance. She stood wringing her hands, and MacBean, watching her from the door of the tank,

scratched his chin in perplexity, and he even forgot to sing.

It was a two-storey brick building, and at any moment it might go up in flames, He shouted to her and beckoned. For a moment she did not understand him. He called her again, and this time she came hesitatingly, and he gripped her arm and pulled her inside the tank. Through the window and door and brick and plaster, over sofas and chairs and tables, went 69, and came to a quivering halt in what at one time had been a respectable living room.

"Upstairs, quick!" yelled MacBean.

The Boy is Found.

The girl needed no telling. She was out of the tank and picking her way across the wreckage almost as soon as the door was open. She disappeared from view, and MacBean waited, wondering what time the mine which he knew was under him would explode. Presently the girl reappeared, clutching a frightened and sleepy-eyed boy, and MacBean, pulling him into the machine, and the girl after him, slammed the steel door and reversed the engine.

But 69 could find no grip for its caterpillars. He tried again, and this time she moved slowly and painfully.

Half the machine was out of the house and half inside when something lifted the front of the tank violently—something which could not be felt or heard or sensed, something which brought blood to the nose and ears of the crew and sent them tumbling like skittles as the tank lifted clear and fell on its side in the middle of the street.

* * * * *

"Good-night, nurse!" said MacBean.

He kept saying "Good-night, nurse!" mechanically until a voice answered him.

"Why do you say 'Good-night, nurse!' when it's only morning, Captain MacBean?" asked the voice, and he opened his eyes and blinked.

There were four other beds in the ward, and they were all occupied by cheerful-looking patients. The red-caped nurse who stood by the side of his own cot and was smiling down at him stooped to smooth the bedclothes.

"Hullo!" said MacBean. "How many legs have I got? And what happened to 69? Did that girl get away with her kid?"

"Oh, yes! You were the only serious casualty," said the nurse. "Your sergeant told me all about it. That is," she corrected, "you and 69. They managed to dig the crew out, but 69 is somewhere under the village of Petit Éloise. And then that girl wants to thank you some day, too."

THE END

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